THE MINER'S RIGHT

ROLF BOLDREWOOD

This Book Belongs to

ANDREW A. MILLER

If thou art borrowed by a friend
Right welcome shall he be
To read, to study, not to lend,
But to return to me.

Not that imparted knowledge
Doth diminish learning's store,
But books, I find, if often lent,
Return to me no more.

Read slowly, pause frequently, think seriously, keep cleanly, return duly with the corners of the leaves not turned down.

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A TALE OF
THE AUSTRALIAN GOLDFIELDS

BY

ROLF BOLDREWOOD

AUTHOR OF 'ROBBERY UNDER ARMS'

IN THREE VOLUMES

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THE MINER'S RIGHT

CHAPTER XXIX

After a while he commenced to pace restlessly up and down the room, studiously avoiding the corner where the awful spectre (as to his disordered mind it appeared) sat crouched with bleeding breast and sad reproachful visage.

'Why did I join with the rioters?' he recommenced. 'Well — some had good cause, who had suffered cursed injustice; most of them, like myself, just followed on partly for the sport and partly because in a general way things wanted mending. I was young and foolish, proud of my strength and pluck, I suppose.'

'What sort of leaders had you?' said the Major, thinking it best to have his narrative concluded now, so that relief might come to his overladen soul. 'Were they Americans or what?'

'Some of all sorts. There was Radetsky—a fine fellow too—they put a price on his head, though *he* fought for liberty. Then Peter Gawlor, the Irishman, who lost his arm in the fight, went in for devilment. A couple of Americans, backwoodsmen, and that scoundrel who calls himself Jake. He deserted the night before the attack; they say he sold us, and brought on the military two hours before we were ready for them.'

'But what madmen you all were. How could you hope,' said I, 'to have any lasting success?'

'Madmen then and now,' he groaned, 'but times were queer then. There was nearly a general rising. If we had beaten back the soldiers we should have been joined by the whole of the crowd, and then, if we had marched on Melbourne with an army swelling as it went, who was there then to oppose us?'

'Who indeed?' I said.

'A great Melbourne merchant told me,' said

the Major, 'that they were prepared for the worst. Many of the young squatters and their friends armed themselves and formed the nucleus of an army corps at the Central Police Barracks at Jolimont.'

'The soldiers fought well,' said the dipsomaniac, with his eyes fixed on vacancy. 'A messmate before a shipmate, a shipmate before a stranger, but a dog before a soldier, ha! I hate them, all sailors do. But they fought like men. They came on at the run, and many of them dropped as we fired, but they charged with the bayonet in style, and our lot began to flinch. I could see the captain at their head, an active, fair-haired, young-looking man, his sword in his hand and a smile on his face. I had a sort of feeling as if I had seen him before, but I was too busy to look long. I saw the soldier that hit Gawlor, and I took steady aim and dropped him. He fell on his face.'

'Well, that was all fair fighting,' said the Major, 'though you were on the wrong side. Is that the worst of it? Your men didn't keep steady, and the regulars marched over them. They always do.'

'That was not all. God send it was, oh!

how happy I should be. A few of us made a stand, and the captain ran up close to me waving his sword and cheering on his men. I felt a sharp pain in my left arm as a bayonet went through it. At the same time one of our men hit the captain a heavy blow with the butt end of a gun. His sword dropped from his hand, and—God forgive me—I snatched it up and ran him through with it. As the handle jarred against his chest he looked me full in the face. "Why, it's Keeper Jack" (that's what they used to call me about the poaching) "all the way from Kent," he said, half wonderingly; "who'd have thought of meeting you here, old fellow. You've hurt me, I'm afraid," and he fell backwards. I was the only man who came alive out of the lot around him, his men saw to that. I was wounded in seven places and laid up in hiding for three months with £500 on my head. I don't know that it's off now. But if he died, why does he go with me everywhere —why is he sitting there now?'

'It's a bad case and a thousand pities,' the Major said. 'Poor Wayse, he was the eldest son, heir to a baronetcy and a good estate. I knew him well, and never thought we should

have for a mate the man that killed him. But it's no use fretting; he wouldn't have thought twice about cutting you down, Jack, I can assure you.'

'But why should I have been picked out to kill him?' groaned the homicide. 'He that was so kind—kind's no name for it. I could have followed him round the world. He was never hard to the rough country lad, as I was then, but as gentle as a woman, though he was as brave as steel. It is no use. I shall see him as he is there till I go to my own place. And then, then he may forgive me. God have mercy upon us.'

There was now nothing more to be said or done. We descended, locking the door, and still could hear the unfortunate victim of strong drink and remorse continuing his harrowing entreaties to be pardoned and set free from torment.

We told Hennessy that we had tried all means in our power, but that nothing save medical aid would be likely to benefit him. So we wended our way homewards, and sent our doctor, who had had considerable experience in cases of that nature.

That gentleman administered to him a very powerful sleeping draught to begin with, and followed it up with other remedies of such a nature that when, a week later, John Bulder presented himself at the claim he looked, though calm and composed, at least five years older, and moved as a man who is making a slow recovery after a fever.

'Had a heavy bout of it this time, mates,' was the only apology he thought it necessary to make. 'Gave a lot of trouble, and talked a lot of d—d nonsense most likely. You had a man on all the time, I suppose. Charge me with his wages in the next settlement, and any other expenses the claim's been put to through me.'

How marvellous is it that reason should so completely resume her sway after being so rudely deposed; that the reactionary feelings of energy and application are so powerfully experienced when the opposite tendencies have been so completely in the ascendant. But such is human nature, on the infinite variations of which mysterious creation 'twere vain to dilate in this brief chronicle.

When such a recovery takes place the mind

and body after a while are so completely restored to their normal tone, that the sympathising observer might conclude not only that no criminal excess had been committed, but that such never could again intervene in the strong and well-regulated character.

'Until the next time,' quoth

'The Fiend to whom belongs
The vengeance due to all our wrongs.'

This alarming outbreak did not, however, affect any one but the chief actor. Like my combat with Malgrade, it was no one's affair but his own. Other highly respectable people suffered periodically from the same kind of attacks. He had abundantly the means of delegating the work he used to perform personally; so that, if he had spent his whole time at Hennessy's, he was quite able to afford it. However, after a few days more he paid off his representative, and commenced to work his shift of eight hours with much the same patience and persevering energy which he had displayed on entering the claim. His spirits rose gradually, his appetite returned, and, as I said before, no one could have recognised in the cheery, hard-working miner the raving lunatic or the despairing

hypochondriac we had so lately been compelled to succour.

His presence as a chief actor at the Eureka stockade, and his confession of having been the actual slayer of poor Captain Wayse, whom every one regretted, was much the more serious phase of the affair.

We knew, of course, that the Victorian juries had refused to convict the rioters when committed for trial for the same class of offence, and we doubted not but that they would pursue the same course in his case.

But actual homicide was different, and if arrested on suspicion of being one of the leading rioters at Ballarat, it would involve his being sent in irons to Victoria; for, of course, bail would not be taken in such a case, and that course we did not at all desire to see carried out.

Doubtless among the miners there were many who had recognised and could swear to him if they chose to give willing testimony; but the general feeling of the community was with the insurgents and against the Government of the day in Victoria. And even if it were not so, no miner would voluntarily assume

the hateful character of informer. The only fear was that the man known as Yankee Jake, who had reasons for personal enmity, might lay an information before a magistrate, and so compel the arrest of John Bulder on suspicion of having committed this high crime and misdemeanour.

However, at the present time, the said Jake, or 'The Count,' as he was indifferently called, had located himself in a quartz-reefing district, known as Mason's, about twenty miles distant, where he was understood to have made several lucky hits, to have been appointed a director in mining companies which had been successfully floated, and generally to be rising into a state of undeserved social splendour and distinction.

For the present, then, it was possible that this Cerberus had his jaws confined with a golden muzzle, on account of which his growling and tearing were temporarily suspended.

As for John Bulder himself, 'Damocles, his sword,' if thus above him suspended, did not produce apparent uneasiness. He worked and jested with the same careless ease as of old, and for a few short weeks care and strife seemed

banished entirely from this our antipodean section of the universe.

. . . . . .

As suddenly as it had commenced, the wet, cold, inclement weather ceased. The sun shone daily with might and effulgence. The water-courses returned to their usual channels, the marshes commenced to dry up. The birds mated. The pasture grasses, hitherto hindered by the harsh winds and frosts of the late winter, made haste to shoot and burgeon with tropical rapidity of growth. All nature revelled in the rich bloom and wondrous luxuriance of the glorious Australian spring.

How different were the roads and tracks from those which we had lately plodded through and stumbled along. Every day added to the pleasure of living. Every change was in the direction of improvement and enjoyable existence. The days became insensibly warmer without being oppressively hot. The billowy prairies waved in the faint breeze which heralded the summer. The foliage of the slender-leaved eucalypti showed a tinge of softer green. And ever, in fine weather as in foul, the reputation of the Oxley goldfield,

based upon the monthly unearthing of more than half a ton of gold, remained high and unwavering.

The weeks passed blithely along, and still so increasingly brilliant were our prospects, so satisfactory the dividends which we received at the Oxley, as well as those of which we had monthly advice from Yatala, that I at length fully made up my mind to settle my affairs temporarily the week before Christmas, and to take this long-looked-for holiday in Sydney, where I could arrange at the same time for poor Jane's voyage to her native land, whither, I doubted not, I should follow her before many months were past.

At our present rate our full shareholders would divide between forty and fifty thousand pounds a man—John Bulder's proportion being, of course, much less than this, as he had no original interest in No. 4 Liberator, of which we now held undisputed possession.

I was loath to leave off such engrossing, exciting toil, but it came at last, the last week before Christmas, the second of the weary, hot, dry, dusty December, which had succeeded our matchless but too brief spring months.

I quitted my work that long-remembered day thoroughly exhausted, and, throwing off my working clothes with a deep sigh of relief, reflected that I should not need to don them again for a month. In the interim I should stand once more—oh, enchanting thought!—on the breeze-swept ocean beach, inhaling the briny odours of the half-forgotten main. At midnight, at sunrise, I should be free to watch the ebb, the flow of the mystic waters. In all my mining life I had not once happened to have revisited the coast since we returned from New Zealand. And now, excited by the near prospect of comparative rest and freedom, I exulted in the idea of exchanging the red-lined roads and yellow mullock heaps, the iron or wooden shanties, the sombre shadeless forest, amid which I had sojourned so long, for the cool streets, the lofty freestone walls, the massed flower thickets, and the unfamiliar luxuries of the City of the Sea.

Poor Jane, too, how innocently she would revel in the novelties and wonders of the Paris of the South before commencing her voyage to the old land. I looked forward, like a boy, to the brief holiday-time we should have before

we parted, perhaps for ever. My heart glowed at the thought that I had the means and opportunity of rescuing her from a hateful tyranny, from a life unspeakably wretched and degrading. The faded rose, once so fresh of petal, so delicate of hue, might, replanted in the ancestral soil, again bloom modestly, again put forth green leaflets, shrinking delicate flowerets.

In happy peaceful years to come we might yet see her, my bride and I, humbled and chastened of aspect, yet peaceful and respected in her village home, gathering with every added year a fuller measure of repose, of that divine peace that is promised to the heart's deep, sincerest repentance.

In all this sanguine, it may be in some respects imprudent anticipation, I can swear it before the Lord of Heaven and Earth, my heart was towards her as that of a brother—of a brother only.

On the morrow early we were to start by the coach at daylight. When the sun set we should be a hundred miles on our way; ere the following midnight at our destination; once more in a land of civilisation, where art refines repose,

and enjoyment rewards industry—fitting prelude to the life of unclouded happiness upon which I trusted to enter early in the coming year.

The sun had long since set. The night was sultry at the same time, but moonless, starless, rayless utterly. Some impending change in the elemental programme had covered the heavens with a robe of vapour so dense that when I rather impatiently essayed to make my way from our tent to the town proper, I more than once got off the narrow track through the network of shafts, being compelled to grope back my way with extreme circumspection.

I attributed my restless and excited mood to the great change in my temporary surroundings. But I felt uneasy to an unusual degree. I had resolved to call at Jane's lodgings and warn her to have her luggage ready to the minute in the morning, as the coach-driver was of a ruthless and inexorable punctuality. And the disappointment of being left behind in my overwrought state of feelings would go nigh to break one's heart, I thoughtlessly said.

She appeared, poor girl, when I saw her, almost as childishly elated as myself at the

prospect of the speedy deliverance from her prison-house, and the translation to a higher sphere, a purer air.

We talked it over at greater length than was perhaps actually necessary, but our hearts were full, genuinely athirst for sympathy. As old friends, cognisant as were none others of a thousand circumstances of our bygone life that the loosened spring of a coming departure seemed to release from memory's coffer, we found a multiform and unexpected fund of mutual interest.

'I shall be a good woman to the end of my days, and, as far as my conscience will let me, a happy one,' she said, 'if I ever reach the Leys again and see the old man's face. And it will be to you, Hereward, and to you alone, that I shall owe it—owe my salvation. God for ever bless you for it, and help you in your need as you have me.'

I had said farewell to her and had come out into the passage of the hotel, into which she followed me, being moved, as it seemed, to say these parting words. This thoroughfare—a kind of corridor between two sets of rooms—was unlighted. A gust from the rising wind

suddenly blew to the door of the apartment we had just quitted. I had reached the outer door when some one brushed hurriedly past me. I thought it was one of the many inmates of the house, and walked on, when I heard a sudden sharp ejaculation, as in fear or anger, in Jane's voice, then a horrible, choking, gurgling, unnatural sound, which sent a thrill through every nerve of my body. I turned hastily to the doorway, and as I did so a man again rushed by me and was swallowed up in the pitchy darkness which now enveloped all things. Breathless with excitement I rushed to the spot near where I had left Jane. I felt along the wall and stopped, almost petrified, as something human clasped my feet, and again the hoarse unearthly sound struck upon my ear, though fainter than at first. Stooping, I raised Jane's fainting form, as I believed. Her face fell helpless forward against mine, and her arms clutched convulsively round my neck. At the same moment I felt something like liquid trickling down my breast and dripping with terrible distinctness on the floor. The hideous reality suddenly flashed across my mind, and I cried aloud for help.

Doors were quickly opened, lights appeared, trampling feet were heard. I was surrounded by the inmates and *habitués* of the house, a quickly increasing crowd. All gazed with widely opened eyes of surprise and horror. Full well might they gaze—for there stood I, Hereward Pole, in a pool of blood, with a dying woman in my arms, her throat cut with a dreadful gash which had nearly severed the head from the body.

For some seconds all stood silent. None seemed to have sufficient presence of mind to speak, much less to move for help, or in other act. Suddenly a voice from the outer edge of the crowd called out in husky strained accents—

'Send for the police—let no one leave the place till they come. I accuse that man of the murder of my wife.'

I looked over the heads of the crowd. There was the grim form of Ned Morsley, while at his side, in ominous proximity, I marked the cold features and evil sneer of Algernon Malgrade.

At that moment the crowd parted, and the sergeant, accompanied by a trooper, strode up the passage.

'What is the meaning of all this? Ha!' he said promptly, 'some one call the women to take Mrs. Morsley and place her on a bed. Send for Dr. Bolton at once. Constable Grant, examine the spot closely, search the passage and room, try if you can find the weapon with which the wound was inflicted. Is the husband of the deceased here?'

'Yes, I'm here. I wish to give this man Pole in charge for the murder of my wife.'

I stood as one bereft of reason when I had seen the dreadful, lifeless, unreal shape borne away by the women, all that was left of poor Jane, but a few moments since (or was it days, months, years since?) so happy and hopeful. And I with this miscreant's false charge ringing in my ears. I, Hereward Pole, her best friend on earth, accused of slaying her.

'Mr. Pole,' said the sergeant, without betraying one atom of surprise, 'disagreeable duty, painful of course, only a matter of form, but I must trouble you to come along with me. Constable Grant, Mr. Pole won't think of escaping, I know, but for fear of accidents, dark night, and so on, allow me, sir—thanks,' and I felt cold iron, for the first time, grate upon my

wrists, and was on my way to the cells where all *détenus* of whatever kind or caste were primarily incarcerated. The clock struck ten. So early in the night too, to strike the knell of hope, life, liberty, good fame. Alas! poor human creature, thou that callest thyself man, made in thy Maker's image, and boastest thyself of will and energy, and election of the better path, how darkly ironic is Fate in its dealings with thee.

One moment happy, healthful, bright with the light of love and life, hope and joy in days to come. In the next, all thy vision red, gloomy with the savour of blood, thy liberty exchanged for the felon's cell, thy fame the sport of falsehood and evil hap, thy life blotted and future marred. Wherefore dost thou not follow the counsel of the patriarch's wife—curse God, and die.

CHAPTER XXX

THROUGH the long hours of that hateful night, which made a true inferno of the close-walled, low-roofed cell, I paced its narrow limits. My brain lay quiescent in dull stupor, or with feverish rapidity ceaselessly revolved the scenery and action of the terrible tragedy, in which I could scarcely realise my part as leading actor, accused criminal. Heaven, surely, without abrogating all functions of justice and mercy, could not suffer my conviction upon so false, so hellish an accusation! Could it be believed for one moment that I, with no conceivable reason for anger, had hurt one hair of her poor head?

No. But it might be proved.

I sprang upwards, as the fiendish suggestion passed through my brain and passed into the darkness as if to look for some subtle imp that

had personally whispered the damning thought. The links of circumstantial evidence were not so far apart but that malice and persistent ingenuity might forge the fatal chain. Men as innocent had ere now ascended the scaffold proclaiming their innocence.

What are the facts?

I am discovered in darkness, in solitude, with the dying woman in my arms. I am naturally covered with blood. Angry voices, one of them a man's, had been heard sounding exactly where she was last seen alive. Then the passionate refusal to 'go home'—a phrase of double meaning. Then cessation of speech and the awful unhuman death-tones which so strangely thrilled me.

I sickened with fear. I thought how such evidence would have tended in the case of another so arraigned before me.

At an early hour of the day, now dawning, I knew that I should necessarily be brought before the bench of magistrates, charged in due form 'that I did on such a day unlawfully kill and murder one Jane Morsley, etc.' There was no escape from that. I saw myself standing in the dock, compulsorily exhibited for the

pleasure of the curious and idle crowd, a spectacle of guilt or shame, as opinion might incline. What had I done in my short life that such misery, such undeserved torments should be heaped upon me?

Worn out at length by racking alternating paroxysms, my aching eyelids are sealed by kindly nature; a blessed sleep enfolds me mother-like, strikes dumb and motionless the crowd of evil shapes that flit through the unguarded portals of the brain.

But anon the busy, babbling, and remorseless day is not to be cheated. The sun—that sun which I fondly hoped to have watched arise as Jane and I were borne swiftly towards the sea, towards hope and happiness, and renewed life for both of us—soon streamed through the apertures of my cell upon me, half a felon, half a maniac, as in my excited imagination I then deemed myself. His beams illumined the silent chamber where she lay a corpse. What a mockery was it that there should be aught but clouds and tempests in this melancholy star, misnamed a world? Was it not rather a hateful prison-house, where souls ruined and doomed in a former state of existence roamed endlessly,

cheating themselves with the hope of happiness, amused by the malice of friends, with dreams of impossible bliss?

One of the constables fully aroused me by bringing in the wherewithal for a rude lavation. He respectfully advised me to dress and have a cup of tea, which would help, as he said, to straighten me a bit before Court time.

He meant well and kindly, as did all the men of the police force stationed there, knowing me well by sight and reputation. Whether guilty or innocent in this matter he possibly did not consider himself bound even approximately to decide. It was not his 'case.' The sergeant would have the getting up of the evidence, and so on. But it was hard, he thought, to see a man like me, who had seen better days, as the common phrase runs, locked up on such a charge. Was I guilty? Who could say? Wonderful things in the history of crime had happened, even in his experience on goldfields, and he was a young man; and where there was a woman in the case, who was to say with certainty what might or might not take place?

So Police-constable Grant calmly arranged

my basin and towel, with a small looking-glass and comb, placed a tin measure of tea with a plate of the same material, containing bread and meat, at the farther end of the cell, mentioned that Court would be open at ten o'clock sharp, and departed.

It was later than I thought. I had scarcely more than time to lave my burning brow and breast plentifully with the ice-cold water, which indeed wonderfully refreshed and relieved me, drink freely, and partake of the smallest morsel of bread, when the iron-bound door again clanged and Sergeant M'Mahon entered with another trooper to escort me to the Court-house.

'Brushed yourself up a bit, Mr. Pole?' he said, with a kindly gravity. 'It's a dreadful business, but there's no use taking things too much to heart before the real time comes on. Have you any legal gentleman engaged to defend you?'

'Defend me!' I said, 'what necessity is there for that? who could think for one moment that I was guilty of such a crime?'

'Never mind the crime, Mr. Pole,' said the sergeant, his keen gray eye resting upon me

meanwhile, as if there was a printed page on my heart which he was deciphering slowly but accurately; 'take my advice and have Mr. Markham. You're not fit to conduct your own case. But I daresay your mates have sent for him long before this. Please to follow me into Court.'

I walked out of the cell dreamily and did as I was told, Constable Grant following within arm's length, as was *de rigueur* in case of attempts at escape. I was then taken through the crowd which filled the Court, and permitted to sit down in the vicinity of the table usually devoted to professional gentlemen, strangers of degree, and parties to civil suits. I saw the sergeant look over at Blake, who nodded his head affirmatively.

The Court is crammed. Even the approaches are so thronged that those afar off desist from endeavouring to gain nearer 'coigns of vantage,' and content themselves with sitting on the fence of the camp reserve. There is a sickening feeling at my heart, which still keeps throbbing with the thought that Jane lies dead, foully murdered, and that I stand here this day in the sight of all men charged with being her slayer.

Truly my enemies had triumphed—so far I was beneath their heels.

Of course, my friends muster strong on the occasion. I see the Major, Olivera, and Jack Bulder, also Mrs. Yorke, the latter weeping profusely, with a large solemn baby in her arms, Mrs. Mangrove and other female sympathisers, all with their best bonnets on as if they were going to church. The Commissioner is seated on the bench with other two magistrates. They look at me with an air of not seeing me, which long practice has enabled them to assume. It is not for them to take for granted guilt or innocence on the part of the accused until the evidence be concluded. There is a man charged with being drunk in a public street. He having been locked up all night, and not being an habitual offender, is discharged with a caution. I watched him passing into the body of the Court, and metamorphosing himself into a spectator, with features quite relaxed and free of care. Another indiscreet has been drunk and disorderly. He is adjudged to pay a pound or to undergo seven days' gaol. He pays, and lightly changes front.

'Hereward Pole, stand up! You stand charged with wilful murder; how do you plead?'

I start as though I had been struck.

'Not guilty,' of course I exclaim.

'Swear Sergeant M'Mahon,' says the Commissioner. And the sergeant enters the witness-box. On his oath he thus deposes—

'I am a senior sergeant of police stationed at the Oxley goldfield. About half-past ten or a quarter to eleven o'clock, P.M., yesterday, while on duty, I was attracted by seeing a crowd at the licensed house of Mrs. Simpson. I immediately proceeded thither, and on entering the house perceived the prisoner standing at the top of the passage with a woman in his arms. She was apparently in a helpless or dying state when I approached. There was a pool of blood at the feet of prisoner. Examined the appearance of the woman, whom I recognised to be Mrs. Morsley, whom I had known at Grenville and Warraluen diggings as the wife of a man named Edward Morsley. Her throat was cut almost from ear to ear. (Sensation. The women cry piteously.) She could not speak. I heard one sound, a kind of

unintelligible moan. I caused her to be placed upon a bed and sent for Dr. Bolton. When I saw her she appeared to be quite dead. Edward Morsley called out from the crowd and said, "I charge this man with the murder of my wife." I said "Very well." I arrested the prisoner and confined him in the lock-up. I then charged him with the wilful murder of Jane Morsley. He said, in answer to the charge, "I could not have hurt her for all the gold in Australia."'

Cross-examined by Dr. Bellair, retained for the prosecution: 'Prisoner looked pale and horror-struck, as any one would have looked under the circumstances.'

Dr. Bellair: 'What, even a policeman?'

The sergeant, with dignity: 'Yes, anybody but a doctor.'

Dr. Bellair: 'I appeal to the Court for protection. It is most improper of the witness to address the counsel for the Crown in this way.'

The Bench is of opinion that no disrespect was intended. The witness is merely desirous of eulogising the professional nerve of surgeons.

Sarah Simpson, sworn, states: 'I am the landlady of the hotel where deceased lodged.

She had been with me several months, and was most quiet and well-behaved in every way. Understood she was going home to England. Mr. Pole, whom she told witness knew her in England, used to come and see her now and then, but not often. Remembered his coming last night. He said to me, "Mrs. Simpson, please tell Mrs. Morsley I want to see her about being ready in time for the coach to-morrow. If she's gone to bed it doesn't matter. Be sure and have her called early." I told her and she went into the front parlour where Harry Pole was. When Mr. Pole was gone, or say a couple of minutes afterwards, I heard the parlour door slam. I heard her say, "I won't go home, I'll die first." Ran out with others directly after, when Mr. Pole cried "Help." Saw him holding her all bleeding in his arms. Oh, my God!'

(Here the witness fainted, and the proceedings had to be stayed till her recovery.)

By Dr. Bellair: 'Can't think who did it. Will never think it was Mr. Pole; he always acted the gentleman, and was a good friend to her.'

'Too good a friend, perhaps?'

'No, sir, he were not—not as I ever see or thought on, and won't believe till my dying day.'

'Perhaps I ran in and killed her, then?'

'Perhaps you did, sir; little men is that vicious when they takes the turn, as they might do hanything. But some one come from somewheres and did it, and not Harry Pole, and that I'll live and die on, poor dear!'

John Henderson sworn: 'Is a commercial traveller, and had been several days in the house. Was just going to bed when he heard some one cry out for help. Ran out into the passage, other people having come with lights. He saw prisoner standing near the end of the passage supporting Mrs. Morsley in his arms. Had seen her in the hotel several times. There was blood on the floor, on his clothing, everywhere. Deceased was bleeding from a large wound in the throat, which had been cut, as the phrase is, from ear to ear.'

Cross-examined: 'Did not hear any one speak before the cry for help. Might have been some talking without his hearing. Had been going over his accounts before going to bed.'

'Was that his way of saying his prayers?'

'Not exactly—it was minding his business, however, and he would recommend other people to mind theirs.'

'Was the prisoner very pale and unnerved?'

'Not more so than any gentleman—himself for certain would have been—on suddenly encountering such a dreadful task. Could not form any opinion as to who had committed the crime; would as soon accuse his worship on the Bench as prisoner of having done it.'

At this stage of the proceedings a note was placed in the hands of the Commissioner, who, after reading it, gave it to his brother magistrates for inspection. After a short consultation, he spoke as follows—

'A letter addressed to the Bench has just been placed in my hands. In it Mr. Markham, who is employed on behalf of the prisoner, states that he has been prevented attending to-day on account of other professional engagements, and requests that the Bench will remand the prisoner until Monday next in order that he may have the opportunity of securing professional aid. Have you any objection, Dr. Bellair, to the course indicated?'

'Under the circumstances of the case, none whatever, your worship,' said the little man, with stupendous dignity.

'Call up the witnesses, Sergeant M'Mahon, and let them be bound over to appear on the day named—Edward Morsley, Algernon Malgrade, Sarah Simpson, John Henderson, are you content to be bound in the sum of forty pounds each to appear on Monday next at the court-house on the Oxley at ten o'clock, there to give evidence in the case of Hereward Pole charged with wilful murder? are you content to be bound?'

'Yes, your worship.'

'This Court stands adjourned till to-morrow morning at ten o'clock.'

The crowd passed out and separated into groups to talk over the all-absorbing topic, with the interesting uncertainty, doubtless, of my innocence or otherwise in the affair.

In a few minutes the whole enclosure was cleared, the court-house locked up. I was again sitting on my bed in the cell, upon which I had thrown myself in dull despair as I re-entered.

Was this, indeed, *my* life? or had I changed souls and destinies as old writers dreamed?

It seems the first thing the Major did after quitting me at the lock-up when I first entered it was to send off a messenger post-haste to Mr. Markham, with a note briefly detailing the circumstances, and enclosing a substantial cheque as retaining fee on my behalf in the preliminary inquiry which was imminent.

On the Sunday afternoon, therefore, that gentleman was ushered into my cell, and, shaking me by the hand with his accustomed warmth and heartiness, appeared only to perceive, like a skilful and courtly physician, a slight social indisposition which regular treatment would be sure to remove.

'Unpleasant affair, Harry, my boy,' he said; 'dreadfully unpleasant; temporary inconvenience, eh? and all the rest of it. No bail allowed either, or of course you needn't have been ten minutes in the Logs. Not but what there are worse places — delightfully cool this broiling weather. Got a crib all to yourself, eh? I say, sergeant.'

'Well, Mr. Markham,' said my chief custodian, 'what can I do for you?'

'Why, send me a chair, of course. You don't expect me to stand for a couple of hours

while I am having a good confidential yarn about this business with my friend Harry, here. When it comes you can lock us in; only don't forget to let me out about tea-time.'

'All right, Mr. Markham,' said the sergeant. 'Is there anything else I can do for you?'

'Nothing, except you were to let me have some brandy and soda. But as that's against the regulations, we must wait for happier times, I suppose. Thanks, that is a good substantial chair—good afternoon for the present.'

And he sat himself down with the greatest ease and deliberation, while the bolt was shot to, the door clanged, and we were alone in the cell.

Mr. Markham's face underwent a sudden and complete change. The expression of rollicking good humour faded away as the door swung on its hinges. When the key had turned and the bolt shot to, nothing was to be seen but a keen concentrated gaze, whence all levity had fled for ever.

I returned his gaze with eyes as unfaltering as his own.

'You never did it, I can see that,' he said, as if in answer to an unspoken question. 'I

had my doubts before I saw you. Don't speak now; if you knew as much of human nature as I do, you'd believe anything or nothing in any case where a woman was concerned. You didn't do it, as I said before. Now, the question is, who did, and how is he to be fixed?'

'I can't tell,' I answered wearily. 'I did not, as you truly say and believe. Why should I have harmed a hair of her head? Poor Jane! I would have done anything in the world for her that a man might do.'

'So I have heard,' he said drily. 'It's a pity that this brother-and-sister business should so often be misconstrued. I don't blame you, my dear boy; young men will be imprudent. But it would have been better for both of you if you had let her go her own way, and you had stuck to your work.'

'It may be so,' I said. 'It is too late to talk of that now.'

'Well, yes; and I didn't come here to moralise. The point is, who do you think killed her, and why?'

'The man who brushed past me in the entry was the only person who had time or opportunity. It was too dark to recognise him.'

'And you have no idea who or what he was like?'

'Something, for a moment, put me in mind of Ned Morsley. I can hardly say why. But it could not have been him.'

'Why not?'

'Because he was among the crowd with Malgrade hardly two minutes afterwards, when I had poor Jane's body in my arms. He could never have stopped and joined the crowd after such a deed.'

'Humph!' said my adviser, 'the night was dark, you said?'

'The very darkest that I have seen for years. There was a thunderstorm at midnight. I heard it coming as I paced up and down this doghole for an hour before.'

'Poor Harry!' he said compassionately. 'You expected to be in Sydney, somewhere about Batty's hotel, by this time. Life's another word for disappointment, isn't it? You have a sheath-knife, I see.'

I knew what he meant. I handed it to him. I had picked up the habit of carrying such a knife attached to my belt from the sailors on the outward bound voyage, and had found it

come in too handily in a rude wandering life to relinquish it.

'Humph! point ground down, edge like an old meat axe, very fine knife to cut butter. What have you been doing with it lately?'

'The fact was that we came to a quartz vein at 120 feet level, and I picked out some very good coarse gold with the point till I broke it off, and had to grind it round. The edge was gapped by young Dawson the other day. I lent it to him to go kangarooing. I didn't think it worth while sharpening it, and indeed was going to give it to Mrs. Yorke for a kitchen knife to-morrow.'

'Humph!' said Mr. Markham again. After this he sat in silence for a few minutes. Then he aroused himself and changed the conversation, encouraging me to talk of old English days, of my life at the Leys, of Jack and Joe Bulder, of my fixed determination to have cleared out in six months, whatever may have been the ebb or flow of the treasure-tide. Lastly he commenced to ask in a general way whom I had seen that day, with whom conversed, what well-known miners, loafers, or quasi-criminals I had seen about the town.

Finally, he exhorted me to keep up my spirits, and to go over and over the few minutes before and immediately after the tragedy, lest haply some important fact may have escaped my observation.

Then he took leave of me, and knocked at the door, first moderately, then impatiently. There was no answer. The sergeant had been called away, and there was no one to release the captive until he returned. Mr. Markham lit a cigar and appeared to take the forced incarceration easily enough.

While accepting the profuse apologies of the sergeant, when he arrived in high glee, having captured a horse-stealer—the show criminal of the division — Mr. Markham seemed by no means fully satiated with prison experience for the time. He lingered in the vicinity, putting careless half-questions that were half-assertions to the sergeant and Grant. Finally, he thanked that official most warmly for the pleasure of his visit and the confidence with which he had honoured him, and strolled off with a last injunction to me to keep up my spirits and try to 'remember up' any facts and details even up to the most minute shred of speech or action

during the few minutes preceding and following the tragedy, or otherwise I should do him no credit as a client, and the enemy—even Dr. Bellair, who was retained for the Crown—would have cause to triumph.

CHAPTER XXXI

The door was shut behind my kindly, good-humoured advocate. He had succeeded in raising my spirits, albeit imperceptibly. A vision of future safety and peace rose, faintly tremulous, amid the dread shadow-land of the dim horizon. Of happiness I did not dream; it could never more be mine. The insatiable Fate, which had so mercilessly dogged my footsteps in this south-land, was still relentless. My reputation stood shamefully linked with the ill-starred dead. Her very name was all-powerful still to injure me with those whose good opinion I valued most in the world. Strangely impalpable Slander! How subtle, how dire a poison art thou! Conveyed in the touch of a hand, in the whispered breath, in the motion of the body, the glance of the eye. As by those wondrous, deadly mediæval

agencies, the life, nay more, the memory, the soul's weal is blasted, shrivelled, stricken dead, and dishonoured before the magical missile, viewless as the wind, secret as the sea, cruel as the grave. Brinvilliers and the Borgias have gone to their appointed place; but modern society still holds those who smile and betray to doom, who stab with words and slay with medicated tongue. Dead or alive, poor Jane had worked me woe. Was I now to be overwhelmed, crushed, obliterated; and was there no hope of succour?

As these and kindred thoughts passed through my mind, already crowded with morbid and gloomy images, my dull ear became increasingly sensible of a deep yet distant murmur, which gradually swelled in volume and nearness to my cell. Half instinctively, as I listened, the sound waves resolved themselves into a familiar rhythmical noise. It was the tread of a large body of men marching in rank.

What was the occasion? Scarcely another *émeute*? What then could it be? In another moment the band of one of the great associated guilds struck the first notes of that grand composition long associated with the dead, with the

last pageant in which they hold formal association with the living. With stupefied unawakened intelligence, as to an overture, I listened indifferently. The solemn awe-inspiring movement was familiar to the ear, yet bearing no message to the heart. Then flashed with electrical suddenness across me the terrible truth—it is Jane's funeral. How had I not earlier realised the possibility of such a ceremony, natural and inevitable as it was?

How inexplicable are the movements of the mind. But a moment since I had schooled myself to a stoical mood of endurance of the ills that might henceforth come upon me. I felt even a feeble kind of reactionary resentment against the course of events which had stricken me down so suddenly, had laid me so low. Mr. Markham's condolences had not been without their effect. After all I was not wholly to blame. I had done everything for Jane's best interests that a man could have done for his own sister. I had been actuated by the best and purest motives, if such there be within this strangely concocted entity, this jumble of 'made ground' (to use the miner's phrase), that we call humanity. And what had been the result?

She lay dead, a disfigured corpse, denied even a seemly appearance in death, she that was so fair. I was in a felon's cell, justly so prisoned in the opinion of a section of the society in which I lived, irrevocably humbled and injured in my own eyes, and in those of my fellow-men. One thought of the sea-washed pier we had both so longed to tread again came through my brain at the same instant.

One breath of the ocean breeze fanned my face in visionary freshness. The contrast, even in glamour and delusion, unmanned me. I cast myself down on my pallet and wept like a child. Long and passionately I wept as I lay there, while the sunshine streamed through in golden flakes, telling of the bright blue cloudless skies without, and of the dry dusty street which our feet had so often paced. Adown this she was now passing for the last time—the last time, ah me! to the pine-crested cemetery. There dwelt many guests that had never dreamed of being bidden so early to take their part in life's last promenade, to taste 'Death's coal-black wine.'

Radetsky had gone there. How strange and unnatural that his restless heart was stilled.

Cyrus, of the mighty arm, was never more to raise so much as the weight of the dry grass stems that fluttered in the summer whirlwinds. And now, Jane Mangold, fresh-tinted, bright-hued, innocent wild rose, as I first remembered her in her country home; the sad-eyed, haggard woman of these last sorrowful months, *she* was gone to be alone with Death—when the train of kindly mourners should return, who paid the last token of respect to a foully murdered sister, a repentant fellow-sinner.

Should I be the next?

In my weakened and excited state the idea assumed a horrible distinctness; it gradually increased to the dimensions of a fear, almost of a form, until, with throbbing burning temples, like to burst with pain, with beating overcharged heart, of which the pulsations seemed to clang intolerably and loudly, I pictured myself carried past my prison, along the self-same well-known road, and saw the familiar faces of friends and acquaintances, decorously downcast, at the same distance from the bier at which I had a score of times walked myself.

It seemed to be a fitting end for this accursed, feverish, treasure-seeking life, in

which the gold was so rapidly turning to ashes and bitterness, to dead leaves, as in the folk-lore of childhood's days.

'Why,' I once more moaned out, 'did I not die by the robber's bullet? A quick shrift, a clean death, worthy of a man, if premature and sudden? Then I should have left behind but fond regrets, but passionate loving tears and manly sorrow for a lost comrade——'

While now——

. . . . . .

I must have been weakened as by a wound, become morbidly nervous and sensitive, for this womanly passion and hysterical weakness to have come over me. But I had hardly tasted food since first the prison bolts closed behind me. Sleep had been either entirely absent or broken and disturbed with frightful images. I had heard of men going mad under such circumstances, and I at times probed and tested my mental powers as if to discover whether or not reason was shaken.

The tramp of feet passed and ceased; the deep tones of the funeral march died away in the distance; the shadows darkened, and finally the cell, which in hot summer evenings felt

intolerably stifling, became filled with darkness. I slept or lay in unconscious stupor. I hardly knew which. But I started up from time to time. In my ear sounded the awful words, 'dust to dust, ashes to ashes,' as if spoken within my cell, and still, ever and anon upon the night breeze came the dirge-like echoes of the 'Dead March' in *Saul,* still the wailing wind-voices of the night cried aloud of death and of doom.

. . . . . .

Pale, unstrung, tremulous should I have found myself before the crowded Court on the appointed morning, but Mr. Markham, who has called in before breakfast, will not have it so. His cheering voice breaks the spell.

'I say, Harry, my boy, this sort of thing won't do at all. I can't have you grizzling and doing the handkerchief business like a peculiar Christian or some of those repentant sinner-parties that intend to sin again when they get another chance. You must pull yourself together a bit or you'll do me no credit, and any goldfield's jury will bring you in guilty for not having pluck enough to bluff it off like a man.'

'I say, governor' (this to the sergeant) 'I'll send him in a cup of coffee from Jones's of my own particular brewing, and you'll see that he takes it, won't you?'

'All right, Mr. Markham, you may depend on me,' said the sergeant good-naturedly, 'and it's what I'd advise him myself, to hold up his head a trifle higher in the Court. There's no saying what evidence may be brought forward.'

'Perfectly correct, sergeant, as usual,' said my professional adviser, with a meaning look.

'Now, I wonder what that old fox has got in his head,' said he to me, as the worthy official departed. 'He's the closest old file I ever met, and I know the police have been hunting up every scrap of evidence they can lay their hands on. I shouldn't wonder that Bellair gets a slight surprise himself to-day. But don't expect too much, Harry, old fellow. You never can tell till the numbers are up.'

Mr. Markham's coffee was, probably, flavoured with something more potent than milk and sugar, or I should hardly have felt so much relieved in mind as I did when my cell door opened, and I saw the Major, Jack Bulder, Olivera, and Mrs. Yorke, all waiting to give

me a reassuring word and smile as I came out.

Their strong undoubting faith acted as a cordial to my worn senses. Here, at any rate, were kindly, honest, and withal shrewd people, who believed undoubtingly and uncompromisingly in my absolute innocence.

'*He* kill her,' said Mrs. Yorke to a large female with a dull distrustful countenance, showing a *soupçon* of the asperity which had occasionally flavoured her discussions with Cyrus. 'I wonder if there's people alive with so little sense as to think of such a piece of rot. Not but what there's plenty of women on the field as wants killing, Mrs. Muggins. I don't say there ain't, but every one knows as he was that soft-hearted about females, young or old, good-looking or homely, it was all one to poor Harry—he had a pleasant word and a smile for all of 'em. More than that, there was nothing he wouldn't do for the humblest of 'em in the way of kindness and rale downright politeness, as I call it. Didn't I see him pick up a big bag of chaff as old Mother Shea, the milkwoman, was a-carrying to the cows one dry time, and hump it the best part of a mile for her, through

the town, too. He kill anybody with a petticoat on, not he! Only he was too dashed soft, and so was run into things as artfuller cards kep' out of, that's what he was, and I'd like to have stuck Merlin and the old sergeant into the Logs themselves for potting the wrong man, and see how they'd like it.'

Here Mrs. Yorke's frightfully revolutionary sentiments were brought forcibly to an end by the onward movement of the crowd, which separated the disputants and surged into the building directly the large door of the Court was opened by the sergeant. By the favour of Mr. Merlin, to whom she had alluded so disrespectfully, she was, however, accommodated with a seat on the form set apart for witnesses, and otherwise treated with distinction. The known fact of her being 'a golden hole woman,' as the miners called her, doubtless operated to her advantage. Wealth has its privileges all over the world, even at the headquarters of the chief of metals.

The Court was now formally opened. Mr. Markham, cool and confident, advanced with a cheerful mien. The Commissioner and his brother magistrates sat with unmoved

countenances, like Rhadamanthus and his peers. Dr. Bellair rose with tragic brow and a mien of awful dignity.

'Your worships, I demand that all witnesses leave the Court.'

The Commissioner nodded to the sergeant, who, in stentorian tones, repeats the formula—

'All witnesses are ordered to leave this Court, until called on to give evidence.'

With this several persons, some not previously known to me, or indeed apparently to one another, prepare to leave the Court, with some difficulty, indeed, on account of the crush and crowding.

'Call Algernon Malgrade,' says the Doctor, with additional majesty, and that gentleman lounges forward and goes into the witness-box, with an air of calm indifference to the hundreds of eyes that are at once directed upon him.

Mr. Markham looks him all over in a keen yet leisurely manner, with the air of a surgeon regarding a subject upon whom he proposes to undertake a serious and critical operation. Malgrade places one hand on the witness-box and stares back in return with his habitual insolence of manner. Mr. Markham softly rubs

his hands and smiles severely, with an air of peculiar benevolence.

Being sworn, the witness thus deposes: 'My name is Algernon Malgrade, formerly in the army. Am at present a miner, residing at the Oxley, where I hold interests in mining properties. Have known the prisoner for many years. Knew him slightly in England before either had sailed for Australia. Have also known deceased and Morsley for several years since they were married, when they lived in Ballarat; knew them well as acquaintances; always thought they lived on the usual matrimonial terms. They quarrelled, as a matter of course, occasionally. Deceased was a high-spirited woman. Like all handsome women, and some plain ones, she had a violent temper; would not swear to that physiological fact, but such had been his experience. Had heard, cursorily, that Morsley was jealous of prisoner. Thought it likely enough, prisoner's conduct had been most imprudent. Saw Morsley when he came to the Oxley a few days since. He did say he should prevent his wife going to Sydney with prisoner. Thought he intended to let matters slide—that is the course he him-

self should have taken under the circumstances. Recollected the night of the murder?—Y-e-es! He was walking up Mayne Street, and came up while smoking to the door of Simpson's hotel. Was leaning against the outer door when Morsley came up. They heard voices inside the passage; deceased, as he thought, called out, "I will not go home, I will die first." Morsley said, "That's my wife's voice," and rushed in. In a moment or two he came out, gasping for breath and greatly excited. I asked him what was the matter? Just then we heard prisoner call for help, and we all went in. I saw prisoner standing supporting deceased, who was bleeding from a wound in the neck and apparently dying. The police came soon after, and Morsley charged prisoner with the murder of his wife.'

'Call Edward Hill Morsley,' continues Dr. Bellair, with solemnity unspeakable.

The spectators drew back. There was an audible murmur as the husband whose wife had been foully murdered answered to his name, and walked slowly and firmly towards the witness-box. I gazed at his face. Save one, he was the man I hated and despised most on

the earth. His dark face had a stern, almost savage, expression, which gained intensity as his deeply-set black eyes met mine ; aflame with the lurid light of all the baser passions, they seemed to glow with demoniac lustre. If there was any tremor of body or quailing of the spirit as he lifted the sacred book and bound himself, as God should help him, to 'speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,' he did not show it by quiver of muscle or outward sign.

Dr. Bellair commences the examination, and extracts with practised ease his sworn statement, the more readily, perhaps, that every word of it is prejudicial to me, and accords with the most favourable hypothesis of the witness's own conduct.

'My name is Edward Hill Morsley. I am a hotel-keeper, and reside at the Miners' Home, Warraluen. I was the husband of the deceased Jane Morsley. We were married at Wendouree Street, Ballarat, and have followed the diggings since then, about four years. We have had quarrels now and then. Last year prisoner came to Warraluen. He formed some acquaintance with me and deceased, whom I afterwards

found he had known in England. Deceased did not tell me so at the time, nor did prisoner. I assisted him in the purchase of shares in the Holman Company, and others, and was very friendly towards him. After he left, deceased kept up a correspondence with him, and seemed restless and dissatisfied—talking of going back to England. I gave her no cause of complaint. At the time of the escort robbery, when prisoner was wounded, deceased insisted on going over to Eugowra to nurse him, and did so against my will. She refused subsequently to come back; she stayed at the Oxley where prisoner lived, and said she would go to England. I came over to the Oxley to see her, and if possible to prevail on her to return to me. I went to Simpson's hotel, where I heard she was staying. As I came up to the door about twelve o'clock, or perhaps nearer half-past eleven o'clock, I heard deceased and some one talking in the passage of the hotel. Deceased said in an excited tone of voice, "I will never go home with you, I will die first." I ran into the passage and found prisoner holding deceased in his arms; she appeared to have been wounded. I ran out to give the alarm, but

was so taken by surprise that I could not speak. In the meantime prisoner called out, and other people came in. I followed them into the passage, and when the police came gave prisoner in charge for murder. Have had quarrels with deceased like other married people, I suppose, but had no ill feeling towards her. She was very fond of admiration, and had a violent temper when roused. This led to altercation of course. She was much worse after prisoner came to Warraluen. Saw Algernon Malgrade at the hotel on the night of the murder. Did not remark him before until the crowd came up. May have spoken to him in the forenoon of that day. Did not have a long conversation with him on that day—to the best of my knowledge, that is; if so, have forgotten it. Is not a particular friend of mine, not more than a diggings acquaintance. May have seen him the day after the escort robbery. Did not see Wall or Gilbert Hawke the day after the robbery; saw plenty of other persons that day. Do not carry a knife on ordinary occasions; have not got one now. May have borrowed a knife since I came to the Oxley to do some trifling act. If so, do not remember. Do not

know a man named Luke Weston. Did not borrow his knife the day before the murder; may have borrowed one from some one. May have said that deceased should not go to Sydney with prisoner, but never to my knowledge that I would cut her throat first. Have said such things in the heat of passion—people often do; never intended her any harm.'

CHAPTER XXXII

Thus far the examination-in-chief. It was now Mr. Markham's privilege to cross-examine. Rising quickly and facing the witness one moment, his features changed visibly as he gazed at him, until they wore an expression of rigid determination well-nigh akin in sternness to those of his opponent. Morsley, on his part, took an attitude, half of weary expectation, half of dogged defiance, like a swordsman who watches his antagonist's eye and hand.

'You have stated to the Bench that you were married in Ballarat about the year 185—. Is that so?'

'Yes.'

'Within a month of that time were you bound over to keep the peace towards your

wife under heavy penalties, having committed a brutal assault upon her?'

'I was bound over; we had a quarrel, but I did not assault her as she stated.'

'Oh, you had not assaulted her; she imagined it?—imagined that her face was cut and bruised also?'

'She fell down and bruised her face.'

'How did she fall down? was she running in fear of you?'

'She was leaving the room hastily when she fell.'

'No doubt she was—very hastily. She was probably afraid of her life, as she had good reason to be. Did you then leave Ballarat and proceed to Granville Rush?'

'Yes.'

'Did the last witness, Algernon Malgrade, accompany you, and was he a partner with you in the Granville Arms Hotel?'

'He came with us, and had an interest in the hotel.'

'Did he suddenly leave the hotel a few weeks afterwards in consequence of a disagreement with deceased?'

'They had some words, and he left.'

'Did not the deceased say that she would not live in the same house with him; that he was a villain and a traitor?'

'She did abuse him, if I remember—but she was in the habit of using strong language. Her temper was always violent.'

'Just so; and yours was particularly lamb-like. You wish the Bench to believe that. This made no difference in your friendship with Malgrade?'

'None at all. I bought his share of the house, and he went to Yatala diggings when it broke out.'

'Did you say in your examination-in-chief that Malgrade was no particular friend of yours?'

'I may have said so.'

'May have said so? You did say so, sir, most distinctly. How do you reconcile that with the fact of your having been a partner with him, and having taken his side in a dispute with your wife? Answer my question.'

'A man may have business transactions with another man without being his intimate friend.'

'Of course, of course; may purchase a property together, after having come away from

another diggings together, live in the same house, and be so bound up together that you take his part against your own wife. You don't call that friendship?'

'Not particularly. I'm not bound to take up all a woman's quarrels. A man on a gold-field would have nothing else to do.'

'Certainly. I see your point, Mr. Morsley —you have proved yourself to be a very prudent, self-controlled, amiable person. But how did you come, at Granville, to have knocked down a man named Albert Hoffmeyer, and broken three of his ribs, in a quarrel arising out of jealousy?'

'That is another affair. I had good reason for what I gave him.'

'Was your wife treated in the hospital immediately afterwards for a broken arm, of the cause of which she could give no account?'

'Yes, I believe so.'

'Another accident, I suppose: fell down, probably.'

'I submit, your worships,' here broke in Dr. Bellair, who had been restraining himself with frightful exertion of self-command all the time, 'that this line of cross-examination cannot by

any possibility bear on the case. The witness may or may not have been a model husband, that peculiarly British institution, but I assert that his patience or amiability is not here called in question. Your worships have only to deal with the point as to whether there is a *prima facie* case against the prisoner upon the charge for which he stands in custody, when it will be the plain unavoidable duty of the Bench to commit him to the next Assize Court.'

'Your worships are doubtless aware,' quoth Mr. Markham, with studied impressiveness, 'of the great and peculiar importance that this witness should be subjected to a searching cross-examination. The issues of life and death are involved; and though this can be but a preliminary examination, it is indispensable, if I am to do full justice to my unfortunate, and I fearlessly assert, innocent client, that no limit be set to my privileges as an advocate.'

'Innocent!' shrieked the inflammable Doctor. 'Innocent! when the very stones in the street cry out for vengeance for the blood of a murdered woman.'

'Murdered, ay—but by whom?' said Mr.

Markham in a low deep voice of concentrated feeling, bending forward and fixing his eyes with mesmeric force and earnestness upon the witness.

It may have been fancy, but I thought I saw the cruel eyes quail before the sudden challenge, the form lose something of its rugged boldness of defiance.

A vivid motion of surprise then possessed me. Could *Morsley himself* have been the murderer? I had hitherto dismissed the idea from my mind. It seemed utterly impossible, in the short space that elapsed between the time in which the dark figure in the poncho brushed past me in the passage, and Morsley standing on the outskirts of the crowd demanding my apprehension as his wife's murderer—dressed also in a lightish gray tweed suit of clothes, that he should have presented so entirely different an appearance from that of the unknown in the poncho.

Mr. Markham evidently was following up some clue. I held my breath and controlled the beating of my heart.

'The Bench is of opinion,' here interjected the Commissioner, 'that Mr. Markham is justi-

fied, in cross-examination, in testing the credibility of the witness in any manner which he may consider suitable.'

'I sha'n't trouble you any further as to your domestic habits, Mr. Morsley,' said my advocate. 'Will you please to answer me a question of quite a different sort? You remember the escort robbery?'

The witness nodded.

'It was on Friday, the 14th April 186—, was it not?'

'I think so.'

'You think so; don't you know it was, sir?' thundered the terrible interlocutor. 'And very good reason you had for knowing it. Now, did you or did you not meet the last witness at a place called the Rocky Springs, in company with other two men whose names I needn't mention, when you and he received a parcel from those men?'

'I did not.'

'You did not? now be careful, you are on your oath. Was one of the men Harry Jenkinson—commonly known as Big Harry?'

'No. I never saw the last witness or him either.'

'You swear that? You did not meet either of them on the day mentioned?'

'I may have met them in the course of a week or two.'

'But not on that day—the day after the escort robbery?'

'No, certainly not.'

'Do you know a man named George Roper?'

'Not that I know of. I can't swear.'

'Call George Roper, sergeant.'

The name is called outside of the Court, and a quiet sleepy-looking agriculturist appears.

'Do you see that man; do you know him?' The man grinned sheepishly.

'I think I have seen him. He sold me some corn once. I see so many people that I can't be expected to recollect everybody.'

'Of course not, of course not, Mr. Morsley; we must try and refresh your memory. That will do, Roper. You can leave the Court. And you didn't see that man the day after the robbery at Rocky Springs?'

'I can't swear one way or the other. I may have done so.'

'At Rocky Springs?'

'No, not that I remember. At another place.'

'Very good. Now, Morsley, attend to me; be very careful in your answer, as the question is important. How were you dressed on the night when deceased came by her death?'

Here more than one spectator leaned forward, as if anxiously awaiting the result of his question.

'In the same dress I wear now,' he answered with perfect composure.

'Just so, a gray tweed suit. I think coat and waistcoat of the same colour, trousers slightly darker; allow me to look at them—a very serviceable suit, quiet, and so on. The second button seems different in colour from the others, and—just permit me for one moment—rather clumsily sewed on: no woman's hand did that, Morsley; comes of quarrelling with your wife, eh? You don't recollect how it came off, I suppose?'

'My bar-keeper noticed that it had come off before I left Warraluen,' said the witness, scowling darkly at his questioner. 'He offered to sew it on for me. Would you like to have the tailor's address that made the clothes?'

'Why, yes,' said Markham, as if he had expected the question, 'he might be able to tell

me *if this button* (here he took one from his pocket) *exactly matches the others in colour*, shape, size—and also in the shade of silk twist with which the others are sewed on. He might be able to swear to that, Morsley, or the reverse, but perhaps you can do so.'

'How can I swear? how do I know where it comes from?'

'*It was found clenched in the dead hand of your murdered wife*, as I shall be enabled to prove,' said Mr. Markham with slow pitiless severity of tone, 'does that help you to recollect how you lost it?'

The swarthy hue of the man's face, which had gained him the sobriquet of Black Ned, visibly paled, and his strong frame shook before he answered sullenly—

'If you wish to accuse me of killing her, you had better say it out at once, but I thought I was a witness and that man in the dock the prisoner.'

'You will be quite clear about your respective positions in a short time, I daresay,' said Mr. Markham, with cheerful confidence.

'I must again protest,' broke in Dr. Bellair fiercely, 'against the extraordinary latitude

taken by the counsel for the defence in this case. Are the feelings of the witness to be lacerated by references to the unfortunate deceased at every turn? Surely your worships will not tolerate this sensational style of examination.'

'My learned friend's client will have to submit to more sensational treatment before he leaves the Court, I feel confident,' said Mr. Markham; 'in the meantime I must request that no restriction be placed upon my undoubted legal right to the severest cross-examination.'

The Commissioner nodded affirmatively, and the intensely interested audience gave a kind of half murmur, as of strained anxiety, as Mr. Markham proceeded—

'You had on no other coat but the one you now wear, on the night referred to?'

'No; it was a warm night.'

'You did not wear a poncho, for instance?'

'No.'

'Have you got such an article of dress?'

'Yes.'

'Where is it?'

'I left it behind at Warraluen.'

'Oh, you left it behind!'

'Yes. The weather was dry and hot.'

'And you have not worn one here?'

'No, certainly not.'

'You are in the habit of wearing a sheath-knife, I believe?'

'No, I am not. I have a pocket-knife.'

'Please to show it to the Court.'

The knife is produced. An ordinary knife, with two blades, one much blunted cutting tobacco. It is handed up to the Bench.

'That is the knife you had in your pocket on the night of the murder?'

'Yes.'

'And you had no other knife in your possession?'

'No.'

'Not at any time during the week?'

'No.'

'Of that you are certain; you didn't borrow a knife from any one?'

'Not that I remember. It is possible that I may have done so during the week, but I have no recollection of it accurately.'

'Quite right, Mr. Morsley, to be careful—*you can't be too careful* in your present position,

I assure you. You can go now; sign your depositions first, though.'

Morsley had turned as if to leave the box, glaring at his persecutor with ill-concealed hatred and malice. An evil look of triumph half gleamed in his eyes, as he took the pen in his hand to write his name with studied coolness. Yet his hand shook in spite of all his efforts. Others, doubtless, noticed this. But many a strong man in that Court had been similarly affected, concerning whom there was no question of guilt or innocence. The symptom was but too common. And the only effect on the bystanders was to confirm the notion that Black Ned had been 'on the drink' lately, perhaps on account of his trouble. And that was quite sufficient in their eyes to account for tremulous penmanship.

He raised his head menacingly as he stepped from the witness-box, and swaggered down the body of the Court with his usual insolence of demeanour palpably exaggerated, probably for the benefit of myself and Mr. Markham. Dr. Bellair cleared his throat and prepared to address the Court with a highly confident air, when the sergeant strode forward with one of

his characteristic seven-leagued movements, and laid his heavy hand upon the shoulder of the retiring witness.

Morsley turned hastily with a face of surprise, almost of fear, which he vainly tried to control, while the sergeant thus spoke in tones which filled the Court—

'I arrest you, Edward Morsley, in the Queen's name, and I now charge you with the wilful murder of your wife, Jane Morsley, on the night of the 16th instant.'

The astonishment of every living soul in the Court, Mr. Markham alone excepted, was extreme and patent. The crowd positively gasped in amazement, as the sergeant, exerting his great strength, pushed the prisoner into the dock, the door of which was opened by one of the constables and closed upon him, he appearing like a man in a dream, dazed and incapable of offering resistance.

As for me, I sat staring before me, almost incapable of collecting my ideas upon the subject. All that I could gather from the action of Sergeant M'Mahon was that he, for some reason, believed Morsley to be the murderer of poor Jane. Mr. Markham, from his question-

ing as to the poncho, evidently leaned towards the hypothesis that he and the man in the poncho were one. But where was the proof? where the connection with any act of his, and the blood so pitilessly, so cruelly shed?

Dr. Bellair was the first to awake to the need for action.

'Your worships, I beg, I demand redress against this proceeding, this most unprecedented, most unparalleled outrage upon the person of a witness, this insult to your authority by this autocratic policeman, after all a subordinate officer of the force. He seems to think that he can arrest any one he pleases. I suppose' (here the little man stood up to his fullest height, and puffed out his chest heroically), 'I suppose he will arrest *me* next!'

'Dr. Bellair,' said Blake, 'Senior-sergeant M'Mahon is fully empowered to act in this matter at his discretion. He is responsible to the head of his department. He, no doubt, has his own reasons for the action he has taken. It is not within the province of the Bench to direct any alteration of the mode in which he has chosen to effect this arrest.'

'Of course,' returned the Doctor, foaming

with rage, 'if the police are permitted to arrest witnesses in Court during a trial, and indecently to interrupt the course of law in any way they please in order to trump up a case, I have nothing more to say, further than that I shall lay a special complaint before the Minister for Justice, the head of the Crown Law Department.'

'Take what steps you think fit, Dr. Bellair,' said the Commissioner, 'but I must ask you, however, to refrain from entering into a detailed description of your probable action. You wish to make an application to the Bench, sergeant?'

'I pray for a remand of the prisoner, Edward Hill Morsley, for eight days, your worships, at the end of which time I shall be in a position to bring most material evidence against him. In the meantime, I desire to apply to your worships to discharge Mr. Hereward Pole from custody, as I have decided not to proceed further with the charge against him.'

A murmur of approbation filled the Court, which fell on my ears like the sound of a far-off torrent, so confused was my brain and

dulled my every sense at this unexpected course of events.

There was a pause of perfect silence while the Bench deliberated. Then Blake looked boldly and cheerily across the crowd.

'The accused, Mr. Hereward Pole, was discharged,' he said. 'The Bench was unanimous in their opinion as to the extreme hardship of his having been placed in his present painful position at all. Unhappily circumstances appeared to be against him at the time of the death of the unfortunate deceased. Sergeant M'Mahon, whatever might have been that officer's private suspicions as to the real criminal, was therefore justified in arresting Mr. Pole. But he, the Police Magistrate, had now much pleasure in stating, on the part of the Bench, that after hearing the evidence brought forward that day before the Court not the slightest suspicion attached to Mr. Pole, and he left the Court, most emphatically, without a stain on his character.'

This announcement was received with a general burst of cheering, promptly suppressed by the sergeant.

CHAPTER XXXIII

The Court was immediately adjourned.

Surrounded by my friends, I was marched off in triumph, escorted by a great crowd that insisted upon following us down the principal street in triumphal procession. A small band of musicians even, on the watch for opportunities of profitable patronage, seized the occasion, and headed the cortege, playing 'See the conquering hero comes,' 'When Johnny comes marching home,' with other airs appropriate, in their opinion, to my circumstances.

For me, like the victims of those death ceremonies of the olden Asiatic communities when stupefied by narcotics, I felt confused with a blare of trumpets and beating of gongs and cymbals. One glance as I left the Court had shown me my enemy being conveyed to the

cell I had just quitted. His face was a study for all evil passions, baffled malice, blind rage, and hate unspeakable. As Malgrade departed he was hustled and hooted by the crowd. The women had come to gradually but distinctly connect him with the tragedy in some shape, and he had become scarcely less unpopular than the principal criminal.

The crowd left us at the cross street which led down to our dwelling, previously calling for three cheers for Harry Pole, which were given with great heartiness and enthusiasm before they separated.

I walked listlessly into our humble dwelling. It looked like a palace after the hateful bare walls of the cell. Throwing myself down on my bed, I felt inclined to sleep for evermore. And, indeed, so utterly wearied was I, so worn out with stress of mind and body, with sleeplessness, anxiety, and pain, that I fell at once into a deep slumber which lasted unbrokenly until sunrise on the following day.

. . . . . .

How wondrously complicated, how tremulously, delicately fine are the first mental movements as our being, truly unwillingly,

extricates consciousness from the trance which so strangely simulates death! How clear yet impalpably minute is the semitone of thought which indicates misfortune already realised, or looming dim and powerless in the future. Magically sudden also is the thrill of relief when the soul, signalling the dread incubus with electrical flash, simultaneously registers the facts of safety and freedom.

So wakes the pensioned soldier, with the well-remembered sounds of parade and drill in his ears, to contrast only more effectively with the blessed independence of rural life in his long-lost village-home. So wakes the newly-enriched heir, half encompassed by the shifts and straitened ways of his ungilded manhood, to rejoice even more vividly in his lofty halls and the tokens of unfettered expenditure. So comes the blissful morn to the freed captive, whose first movements seem guarded by his prison walls, upon whom the quick joy of realised freedom instantly breaks with the beam of heaven's light.

As the sun streamed unimpeded through the window of our cabin, my soul seemed to be irradiated, my whole being pervaded with

a gratitude so deep that for a moment I shrank from it as disloyalty to her who lay so cold and still in a blood-stained grave.

'Well, Harry!' said the crisp, unsentimental voice of Mrs. Yorke, 'you'd better come and have your breakfast if you're ever going to get up again. You've had enough sleep by this time. Don't take on overmuch—it's no use doing that. Poor Jane's gone, and there's an end of her. We're all sorry enough for it, but fretting won't bring her to life, and there's no use your grizzling all the health and strength out of yourself if she is dead. I'd clear, if I was you, and cut digging for a spell. The claims 'll go on all the same as long as they're worth sticking to.'

'I am going away, Mrs. Yorke,' I said wearily. 'I shall leave my interests in the Major's hands. I know I can trust all the mates. My loathing of this place, and all things connected with it, I can't describe. I hope I shall never see a diggings again.'

'I feel pretty full up about the field myself at times,' she answered, 'and good reason I had.' Here her face softened, and the tears streamed down her cheeks, suddenly as an

April shower. 'But I don't know as I could better myself living in a strange town among a lot of people as couldn't tell wash-dirt from mullock, and never saw a tin dish used except to set milk in. I was quite a girl when Cyrus and I came on the diggings first, and I've followed them so long that I can hardly content myself anywhere else. But it's different with a man; and I should up stick and be off to England by the first mail steamer if I was you.'

'I daresay I shall do something of the sort directly, but just now I feel as if I were some one else. The change that has come over me has taken all my old feelings away. I can hardly describe it.'

'There's one thing would keep me for a bit if I was you,' she said in a lower tone, 'and I'd wait a year to see it if I was dying to get away.' A hard bitter look came over her face as she spoke.

'Why, what could that be?'

'To see that villain, Ned Morsley, hanged,' she said below her breath.

'Ha!' I returned, 'I had forgotten the brute. Still I don't see how the guilt is to be brought home to him, though I have a conviction now

that his hand alone could have struck the blow.'

'Of course he did,' she said, 'every child on the diggings knows that, and me blackguarding the poor old sergeant and Merlin for running you in when they only did it to throw that wretch off his guard while they hunted up the evidence.'

'Is that the reason why they did it?' I stammered out. 'How little my feelings seem to have counted in the matter.'

'Well, you see,' said Mrs. Yorke sagely, 'the police can't afford to consider people's feelings, it's the "case" they have to give their minds to, as Mr. Merlin told me. He's away at the Fish River on the track of Gilbert Hawke; but I'll go bail the sergeant's got a few bits of evidence that Mr. Black Ned don't reckon upon. They've got Mr. Markham for the Crown now, and Morsley's got the little Doctor to defend him. The case will be on next Monday, and I'll be there if I'm spared.'

'I suppose I shall not be away either,' I said. 'I may as well see the thing out. It is only the next shifting of the scene in my life's drama.'

There were yet several days which must elapse before Morsley could be put upon the preliminary examination, the prelude to a final trial before judge and jury.

This interval was more difficult to dispose of than any period which I could recall since my arrival in Australia. I had entirely lost the spring of action which had formerly incited me to labour. The hope of success then lured me on. Now that success had come, the bitter blight of sorrow, the settled night of adversity had destroyed all hope. The future was filled with impenetrable gloom. I had had no letter from home either since the last one from my darling Ruth, in which she had avowed her unfaltering belief in my innocence, and her resolution to abide by me at all hazards.

What might have happened in the interval? I trembled to think. Had she been induced by her parents—justly, as they would argue from their point of view, incensed against me—to marry one among the well-born, perfectly unexceptionable suitors, who doubtless were but too eager to offer themselvès to the heiress of Allerton Court.

The hours, the days, the long bright days of

an Australian midsummer, seemed as if they would never come to an end. Yet the weariest work was over. My prison doors were opened. My trial, in the face of the curious crowd, with all its racking torment and corroding anxiety, had been concluded. I was triumphantly cleared in the face of the society in which I lived of the frightful accusation under which I had lain prostrate.

Once more I stood a free man under the broad blue sky of heaven, without trammel or fetter. How strange it was to feel thankful for such a boon—I that had hitherto been as free as the bird that cleaves the sky, without thought of cage or knowledge of captivity!

For the first day or two levees of sympathising friends and acquaintances gave me no time wherein to think over plans for future action. People to whom I had never spoken came from comparatively distant diggings to shake me by the hand, and congratulate me on my acquittal. I found that a widespread belief had existed throughout the goldfield that my being arrested at all was an outrage and an injustice. They had not dreamed of interfering with the administration of the law (there being no 'shallow

ground' in the case), but were not the less united on the score of my having suffered wrong and injustice.

I had not, indeed, slept the second night in our joint abode when an influential deputation, consisting of some of the leading miners and business people of the goldfield, waited upon me for the purpose of ascertaining if a certain day would be convenient for me to be entertained at a public dinner specially arranged in my honour, and designed therein to exhibit the unanimous public sentiment on my behalf.

I was not, as may be believed, in the humour for festal assemblages of any sort or kind. My first impulse was of unqualified denial. But the feelings which prompted the invitation were generous and manly. I knew that my refusal would be construed by many as, if not an insult, at any rate as implied personal superiority to my entertainers. I had decided at no distant period to leave the locality, and to let drift my miner's life behind me for ever. And I could not deny but that this would be a fitting opportunity to say farewell to those with whom I had so long worked and dwelt on terms of perfect social equality.

How utter was the change, the revulsion of my feelings. The goldfield, with its surroundings and associations, had all become hateful to me. I could not walk down the street, or take part in ordinary duty or pleasure, without being reminded of the dear dead Jane, and of the pleasant aftertime we had dreamed of when she should be restored through my instrumentality to her old quiet home and a life of peace, in which, shielded from every evil, she might devote her days to good deeds and repentance. Ah me! All such pleasant pure imaginings had been blasted, shattered into more than oblivion—into a bitter and blood-stained memory; into a horror and a crime which must suffice to render barren of joy years of my future life.

I had announced my intention without delay to the Major and my other mates in the claim. I should take away the cash which stood to my credit in the bank, and leaving the Major as my authorised agent, by power of attorney, trust to him to guard my interest and remit whatever further moneys might accrue to me up to the time when Greenstone Dyke and No. 4 were worked out, and either abandoned or made

a present of to the wages-men, as the case might be.

I should have more than sufficient for all my needs, and for whatever life I should elect to lead in England or on the continent. I could travel. I could lead a society life, if it so pleased me, among the *haute volée* of the great cities of the world, to which a man of good family, if duly gilded and not disqualified by manners or morals to which exception can be taken, can always procure the *entrée*. I could live quietly and luxuriously in the land of my birth, in town or country, whichever might best suit my humour. In a word, I was free to choose the perfectly untrammelled heartless life which so many people consider to be the most precious result of realised wealth.

Such had not been the goal to which my thoughts had turned when I placed the warm quick pulses of youth, the settled purpose of manhood, in the scale—trusting to the hazard of brave adventure, and the goodness of a merciful Providence for success, after a few years more or less of honourable toil, of manly endeavour.

No! far otherwise was the pinnacle to which

I had essayed to climb. A height which should be irradiated by love and honour, as well as by personal happiness, by the gratitude of the poor, the respect of the rich, the encircling belief which alone finds life worthy and leaves it ennobled.

And to what kind of stagnant existence was I now doomed? To the selfish withdrawal from all of the honourable cares of humanity, to the well-clothed, well-fed, well-amused passage through barren hours, which, as by the subtle action of a mineral fountain, turns the heart and every moral tissue to stone.

. . . . . .

During the period which elapsed between my liberation and the examination of Morsley by the Bench, the probability or otherwise of his being the murderer of his wife was the chief centre of thought, the leading topic of conversation among all classes at the Oxley. Curious half-forgotten scandals were exhumed, giving colour to the most extravagantly improbable theories as to the actual slayer and his presumed motives.

'It was a former admirer, driven to madness by her coquetries, who had offered to elope

with her by the next American mail steamer, and to settle ten thousand pounds upon her.'

'It was no man at all but a jealous woman-rival, who had sworn years since to be avenged on her, and included in that evil prayer the promise that she never should quit the goldfield alive!'

'It was a mistake from beginning to end. Fitzpatrick, just returned from Granville Bar, had heard that his wife was staying at Simpson's and carrying on "top ropes," as the phrase for "light life and conversation" then obtained, had rushed over maniacally and, seeing the unfortunate deceased parting with a stranger on terms of friendship, never stopped to reason, but, the likeness being curiously close as to figure and height, rushed in and committed the fatal deed. He and his wife were off to California within forty-eight hours.'

These and other mournful or ludicrous versions were (as I heard afterwards) freely bandied about and accepted as true or probable statements.

A strong general feeling of belief in the guilt or complicity of Morsley pervaded the minds of the more closely-reasoning portion of

the population, from the man's known savage and pitiless nature—from the bad terms on which he and poor Jane had notoriously lived—most of all from a general instinctive habit to think ill of him and Malgrade, which showed the deep unpopularity which now encompassed him.

But if in reality guilty, how had he so suddenly appeared among the crowd, ready and willing to charge me with the crime? Was it in the nature of things, was it credible that any man should commit so diabolical a deed, and appear within five minutes apparently on a level with other spectators, and sufficiently free from all trace of crime to fear the searching scrutiny of the police?

Thus reasoned by far the greater number of the miners and residents on the goldfield, and thus in good sooth did I myself incline, strong as was my distrust of every word and deed of the ruffian to whom poor Jane had been so fatally bound.

Could there be any other human creature so strongly interested in the death of the unhappy woman? It could not be so.

Morsley, and he alone, must have filled up

the measure of his iniquities by dyeing his hands in the blood of the helpless creature whose life he had ruined, sending her into the presence of her Maker, as she had foreboded, poor soul! without one moment's preparation for the dread ordeal.

The frank vengeance of the middle ages, when rulers had the power to enforce personal expiation of unusual crime, would have torn to pieces such a man by wild horses; the populace, greedily curious and critical, would have gloated over the ghastly spectacle, watched the rending of the living muscle, the dislocation of the tortured limbs. And could not I, too, have shared the fierce pleasure with calmness if not with exultation? And there was wild justice in the custom. Why should the arch criminal, the cool contriver, the remorseless agent in a plot of devilish bloody deed, bear but the same penalty as the frenzied foolish rustic, the half-besotted maniac, who slays in fury and weeps over the deed he has committed?

However I might suffer personally, I determined not to quit the Oxley until I had witnessed the trial of my enemy, and heard the nature of the evidence to be brought against him.

I knew that the sergeant would not have taken the decisive step of arresting Morsley in Court and applying for a remand unless he had something more than ordinary circumstantial evidence *in petto*. Whatever it was, the outside public, myself included, were left in total ignorance of the nature of it. Mr. Markham was now retained on the part of the Crown, a recognised practice which obtains in important police cases. Dr. Bellair was special private counsel for the accused, and, I knew, could comport himself with his usual intensity and aggressiveness.

As regarded my partners, nothing could have been more considerate, more delicate than their every word and act. The same might have been said of every chance acquaintance of the goldfield generally. The miners, better than most men in more conventionally apportioned communities, understood the difficult position in which I had been placed—appreciated the loyalty in which I had striven to carry out my trust.

'Why didn't the darned skunk put a head on his devilry while the *pronunciamiento* was out?' queried Sonora Joe wrathfully, 'then we

could have lynched him quite high-toned and respectable like. Now, I bet the nigger will be indulged with a judge and jury foolin' round. Couldn't do no more if he'd been a full-sized Chow destroyer in the Flat troubles.'

'We're not quite so quick as you are, Joe, and we like to hang the right man, you see. But I'll back British institutions against Yankee ones any day in the long-run. You'll see an infernal scoundrel get his deserts, or I'm much mistaken, and everything done ship-shape and Bristol fashion.' So spoke Captain Blogg, late of the *Maid of Avon*, merchantman, which, having been deserted by her crew, from the boatswain to the cook's mate, was long a sheer hulk in Hobson's Bay. Finally, the captain and mates had to go, unless they elected to become a band of Flying Dutchmen, without the ability to fly out of the great land-locked Bay of Hobson, where the navies of the world might ride.

'Wal—I don't reckon to dispute John Bull's ways, not so much as I did when first I came on these diggings. I surmise that he's a critter as knows what he wants and mostly hez it. But you mind me, Joseph L. Jefferson, that if

there's no rope twisted for that woman-murdering hound, there's a rifle or two will crack, as mostly carries true when the bead's drawn on a man.'

The Major, to do him justice, never recalled any of our conversations in which he had warned me against imprudent entanglement, and the dangerous companionship of any one of Eve's daughters, young or old, married or single—they were all alike to be avoided and distrusted by the wise man.

'You're weak and low now, Pole, old fellow,' he said; 'nothing but change—change from this confounded New World, which has become old to us—will set you up. You've had the fever, so have I, so have most men, the wise and the unwise—Edgar Borlase among the number, who was left among the dead on one of life's battlefields many a year ago. But he arose and staggered off, finally was cured and became strong, outwardly at least. So will you. But you must change the landscape, from these endless forests, these monotoned mullock heaps, to green England's glades and meadows. Ha! the thought is entrancing. What do you say, Olivera?'

'I quite agree with you,' said that calm enthusiast, who now strolled up, meerschaum in mouth. 'We should be justified in getting the Commissioner to send Pole down in charge of the police, only to be released on shipboard. He has so unhinged his nervous system that nothing but sea air and his boyhood's home will have power to cure.'

'Why don't you come back to Europe too?' I said rather thoughtlessly. 'You might as well come, for all the good you are doing here?'

Olivera's eyes flashed, and he stood for a space without speaking. I thought I saw a slight flush pass over his dark-hued countenance.

'You are right, perhaps,' he said, 'though you cannot know the reasons which I have for longing once more to set foot on English soil; but it is my destiny to remain here till the hour of success and triumph arrive. It may be that a generation shall pass before that result. Till then I shall continue to be a miner wherever on this broad continent the gold lure beckons.'

'You are not to be discouraged, then,' I said, 'no matter how unfortunate you may

continue to be,' charmed momentarily out of my own sorrows by this man's imperturbable fatalism.

'Fortunate and unfortunate are relative terms,' he replied calmly. 'I believe firmly that before my destiny is accomplished in this land I shall amass wealth by means of mineral discoveries, whether by means of gold, silver, copper, or tin, I cannot say. But that my fate is connected with one of these metals I am as certain as that we stand here. Good-night.'

'I shall leave directly after this trial, Major,' said I, as we prepared for rest. 'You need have no fear further of indecision on my part. But I cannot go away till I have heard the fresh evidence which has evidently been procured by the police. I feel as if it was a sacred duty which I owe, not only to myself, but to *her*.'

CHAPTER XXXIV

On the day to which Morsley stood remanded I once more entered the court-house, under very different auspices from those of my last appearance there.

Accompanied by the Major and Olivera, I was warmly received by Captain Blake, and we were accommodated with seats by special permission of the Bench, whence we could observe the proceedings at our leisure.

The time of opening the Court had been purposely anticipated by us, as we wished to be freed from the inconvenience to which the inevitable crush of the crowded building would have given rise.

The hour, however, arrived, and the man.

Had I been of a persistently revengeful nature, every feeling of that kind must have been gratified when I saw my enemy brought

in, carefully guarded by the police, and placed in the dock. The sergeant's expression, it is true, betrayed no other feeling than that which might have actuated a zealous naturalist in possession of a very rare living specimen liable to take flight at any moment. On his calm brow, in his watchful gray eyes, was no faintest sign of moral reprobation or even partial disapproval. Nothing but unsleeping vigilance, nothing but inflexible determination, nothing but the most careful reminiscent accuracy, as of a dux in a mental arithmetic class continually examining himself lest he might have forgotten his calculation.

As for Edward Morsley, his fierce features were clouded, as of old, with the look of sullen defiance which was natural to them. I looked at him from time to time, wondering in my own mind whether prejudice caused me to see guilt in every line of his face, or whether I did him wrong and translated the shadow of past crime into a reflection of the deed still untracked and unavenged. Who could say? Was it real, true, actual fact that Jane had been foully done to death, was buried, lost to all things beneath the sun for evermore? Why could not the

dead for one short space return and avouch the truth, confound the guilty, and absolve the innocent? Mystery of mysteries! Portals inscrutable of the silent eternities! what secrets do they not enfold!

Again the Court is filled. The Bench is seated. The witnesses are in attendance. Mr. Markham and Dr. Bellair, like heralds in the mediæval tournaments, are busy with preliminary arrangements, on which hang the issues of life and death.

Before progress can be made with the new trial, all proceedings are read through which have been initiated on the former occasion.

Then the Bench inquired of Sergeant M'Mahon if he had procured additional material evidence in the case on account of which the prisoner had been remanded.

'On most insufficient grounds, your worships,' said Dr. Bellair.

Mr. Markham smiled in a gratified manner. The sergeant stroked his immense beard, which concealed the third button of his uniform coat, and merely remarking—

'The Bench may be of a different opinion shortly, Doctor,' said, 'Call George Corbett.'

A respectably-dressed, open-countenanced miner stepped forward and went into the witness-box. When sworn, this was his statement—

'I am a miner, and reside at the Oxley, where I am a shareholder in the Crinoline claim, Red Hill. On the 20th instant, on the night of the murder, I was coming up the town, when I saw a man covered up with a poncho come out of Simpson's Hotel and run down Mayne Street. He stopped just opposite to me and turned into a side alley near a butcher's shop. There is a deep shaft close to the edge of the lane. He stopped for a second or two and walked quickly up to the hotel again. His clothes then looked of a lightish colour, and he had no poncho on. To the best of my belief the prisoner now before the Court is the man. I did not speak to him, but followed him to the hotel. There was a crowd collected there, and I heard the man in the light clothes say, "I give that man (meaning Harry Pole) in charge for murdering my wife." Then I heard that Mrs. Morsley was killed, and I saw the police take away Harry Pole. Showed Sergeant M'Mahon the shaft after-

wards, which I spoke of, near the butcher's; it was an old shicer and pretty deep. It could hardly have been two minutes between the time the man in the poncho came down the street and returned.'

Cross-examined by Dr. Bellair: 'Have no acquaintance with prisoner. Have seen the deceased, Mrs. Morsley, several times; did not know her to speak to. Know Harry Pole, as a digger merely; am not a friend of his. May have passed him the time of day. Told the sergeant that I saw a man run down the street at the time of the murder. Showed him the shaft afterwards. It was one of the old block claims before the main lead was struck. Must be about sixty feet deep. Have no interest in the case one way or the other, but would do anything in my power to bring a murderer to justice. Any man worth calling a man would do the same.'

'That will do; you can go down,' said the Doctor. 'Your moral ideas are not called in question, and your evidence is not important one way or the other.'

'You will see more about that, Doctor,' said the sergeant with marked respect. 'Your wor-

ships, I desire to tender evidence personally in the case, and request to be sworn.'

'I also desire to know whether the police are to be Crown prosecutors, advocates, gaolers, and witnesses all in one, and acting in the same case whenever they may see fit to try and procure a conviction,' cried out Dr. Bellair. 'I submit, your worships, that the fact of a police officer usurping all these powers is monstrous; in every way most improper and unauthorised. In the name of my client I demand the protection of the Court.'

'The Court is of opinion, Dr. Bellair, that Sergeant M'Mahon has a perfect right to tender evidence in this or any other case which, from circumstances, may be most material. Swear the witness.'

The sergeant is accordingly sworn with due solemnity. He deposes as follows—

'My name is John Fitzgerald M'Mahon. I am a senior-sergeant of police stationed at the Oxley. On the 20th instant I was on duty at the lower end of Mayne Street, when I observed a crowd forming in the vicinity of Simpson's Hotel. I proceeded there as quickly as possible, thinking it might be a fight or a

fire, and passing through the crowd I saw Mr. Hereward Pole supporting in his arms the deceased Mrs. Morsley. She appeared to be in a fainting or dying condition. Blood was flowing from her throat freely, and Mr. Pole's hands and clothes were covered with her blood. I had her placed upon a bed. About a minute afterwards the prisoner called out to me from among the crowd to take Mr. Pole into custody, whom he charged with the murder of his wife. I did so. I noticed at the time that prisoner was dressed in a gray tweed suit, as at present. I saw that one button was missing between the upper or throat button and the third. I looked at his hands; they were free from stain. I left Constable Grant in the house with instructions to him to search closely around the spot where the deed had been done. After locking up Mr. Pole (which I did to throw the guilty party or parties off their guard)——'

'Mr. Pole is very much obliged to you, sergeant,' said Mr. Markham, 'I feel certain. No doubt he will recognise the compliment when he has a little leisure for consideration.'

'We have to manage these things in our own way, Mr. Markham. It was a little hard

on him. I beg to resume my evidence.—I returned to the house, and very closely and carefully examined the corpse of deceased. In the right hand, which was clenched, I found this button (already produced by Mr. Markham); it corresponds with the buttons upon the coat at present worn by the prisoner, from which a button similar in size and shape has been lately torn and replaced. I caused this button to be compared with those upon prisoner's coat when he was asleep, and can produce the witness who so compared them. There was a small piece of silk thread, known by tailors as "twist," in the button. It is the same as that used in the sewing of the other buttons of prisoner's coat. A few hairs, as from a beard, were tangled in the clenched fingers of the left hand of deceased. I produce them wrapped in paper. They are black, curling, and slightly tinged with gray. They correspond with the beard of the prisoner. The hair of deceased was light brown, almost flaxen.'

The sergeant stooped down and placed before him on the ledge of the witness-box a formidable parcel, which he commenced to open carefully.

'From information received, I went on the following day to a shaft in a narrow lane close to Simpson's Hotel. I caused myself to be lowered down it, taking a candle, and examined the bottom. I there found a pair of loose dog-skin gloves; they were on the poncho produced (sensation); it is of dark cloth, and of a size suitable to prisoner. There are fresh stains upon the gloves, chiefly on the right hand one There is a dark reddish stain upon the outside of the poncho on the front, as if a sudden gush of liquid had produced it. I also found a knife, which I now produce. It is a sheath-knife, ground very sharp, and slightly curved inwards. The blade and handle are stained with blood—recently stained and hardly dry. In the pocket of the poncho was a handkerchief (which I produce); it is marked in a woman's handwriting E. H. M. There were also a newspaper unopened, and two letters unopened, addressed to Mr. Edward Morsley, Warraluen.'

Cross-examined by Dr. Bellair: 'Have known prisoner for several years, ever since he came to Granville Rush. Am not prepared to say that he has committed offences against the law, but he has always been an associate of

bad characters. Have had him watched since the night of the murder; do not consider that kind of espionage improper when men are suspected of crimes such as prisoner is now charged with. Cannot swear that prisoner is the man whom the witness Corbett saw running towards the shaft, but consider that the evidence produced tends strongly in that direction. Prisoner in his evidence in Pole's case distinctly swore that he did not own a poncho. Have more evidence to bring forward.'

'Call Luke Weston.'

A short, broad-shouldered, swarthy man with earrings now steps forward, whose rolling gait betrays acquaintance with the high seas, and leads to the suspicion that he left his last ship without applying formally for leave.

He is sworn, and, hitching up his trousers, makes the following answers to Mr. Markham—

'My name is Luke Weston. Am a miner. Came out in the *Cambysus*. Have been here about three months digging. Know the chap in the dock. Saw him at Pegleg Gully last week. He was chucking his money about, but seemed down on his luck, like. We were talking about knives, and I threw my knife

and made it stick in a board. It's a trick I learnt of the Spaniards when I was hide-droghing in South America. He looked at it and said the edge was sharp, too. I said it was, and no mistake. I wanted a job, and he said he'd give me a line to a friend to put me on as wages-man at a reef at Warraluen. I took it very kind of him. He advanced me a pound to pay my coach fare. We had a couple of drinks before we went to bed. Just as he was going away he looked at my knife, and I said I'd give it to him if he fancied it. I took off the belt and sheath and all. He laughed and walked away with it. I went to Warraluen early next morning. I look at the knife produced; it is my knife. I will swear to it by the wood of the handle, which is a Brazil wood. I also look at the belt and sheath produced. They were my belt and sheath. The sheath is not leather—it is raw horse-hide dressed in Spanish fashion. I swear prisoner is the man I gave my knife to.'

By Dr. Bellair: 'How did I leave my ship? Well, ran away, if you want to know particulars. Lots of other sailor men did the same. Had been drinking a little during the evening with

prisoner. Was not drunk, nor even half seas over. Got work at Warraluen on prisoner's recommendation. Do not think it mean to give evidence against him. Believe him to be a bloody murdering land-pirate that ought to be hung at the yard-arm.'

'Call Constable Grant.'

He is sworn, and thus gives evidence—

'My name is Donald Glencairn Grant. I am a police constable stationed at the Oxley. I remember the night when Mrs. Morsley was murdered. I saw her conveyed to bed. I remained when Sergeant M'Mahon arrested Mr. Pole and conveyed him to the lock-up. I remained behind, and, in accordance with instructions, examined carefully the room where the murder took place. I found a gold sleeve button or sleeve link, such as shirts are fastened with, which I produce; it was down on the floor and was stained with blood. It has the letters "E. H. M. Ballarat" engraved on the inside. It is rather a large stud, and is of Australian gold, I should say. I was present when Sergeant M'Mahon found the button and the hair produced in the hands of the deceased. He sent me to call Mrs.

Simpson before we touched them. We had great difficulty in getting them, as the hands were so tightly closed. Immediately upon prisoner being arrested last week, I went in accordance with previous instructions to the room which he had occupied at the New Zealand Hotel. I found Mr. Malgrade, who has given evidence, about to enter, but I prevented him from doing so, saying I was about to seal up the door. I searched the room and found at the bottom of a trunk the belt and sheath which have been produced during the examination of the last witness. The trunk had "E. H. Morsley" painted on the outside. It was a leathern travelling trunk or portmanteau. I also discovered the fellow to the sleeve link produced, which I found on the floor at Simpson's Hotel, stained with deceased's blood. The sleeve link which I now produce was not stained; it is exactly like the other, and has the same letters engraved, also Ballarat. I then sealed up the door and came away.'

By Dr. Bellair: 'I was told to watch prisoner in a general way after the murder, as evidence might be forthcoming against

him. Do not know why Senior-sergeant M'Mahon did not arrest him on suspicion if he suspected him. It was his case; I suppose he had reasons for what he did. Do not know anything about prisoner or his wife. Have only recently arrived on this field. Was formerly stationed at New England. Have heard in a general way that prisoner was jealous of his wife. Did not trouble my head about that part of the affair, it was no business of mine. Believe it to be my duty, as a police constable, to prevent crime if legally possible, or to aid in apprehending criminals.'

Mr. Markham suggested that if the Doctor wished to examine the witness as to the 'whole duty of man' as applicable to the police force, he could not do better than consult that admirable manual of regulations lately issued by the Inspector-General, and save the time of the Court.

Dr. Bellair submitted that he had a perfect right to test the credibility of any witness, and was not inclined to take for granted the good faith of the whole police force, believing that they were too fond of getting up sensational

cases and manufacturing evidence which rested upon the most fragile foundation.

As the details, which had been so carefully collected by the sergeant, wrought themselves one by one into their appointed places, links in the chain of circumstantial evidence which gradually environed the prisoner, every eye in the Court was fixed upon him with horror and reprobation. For him, he seemed wholly absorbed in his own reflections, and apparently failed to perceive that he was the centre of a thousand unwavering, unfriendly regards.

It was only towards the end of the protracted proceedings, as he leaned heavily upon the front of the dock, that I marked a gradual sinking of his muscular frame—a pallor approaching ghastliness overspreading his features. Once only did his eye meet mine, when arousing himself he stared me fully in the face, leaning on his arms. If a look could have killed, my life would have ended there. Rarely do mortal men encounter so dreadful a gaze. Such eyes may glare hopelessly from forms tormented, accursed, in the inferno devoted to arch criminals. Wretched

and degraded as are the dwellers in the dark places of the earth, even among them such demoniac malice is rarely exhibited. I shuddered instinctively, and felt relieved to think that this was in all human probability our last meeting.

Mr. Markham made a short telling speech, carefully confining himself to those parts of the evidence which in his mind most conclusively connected the prisoner with the crime. Whatever doubt their worships might have in their own minds, it was not for them to usurp the functions of a jury, to whom would be left the duty and responsibility of deciding whether or no the evidence established the prisoner's guilt. The plain duty of the Bench was to commit the prisoner for trial at the next ensuing Court of Assize.

And this view of the case the Bench unanimously took, in spite of a tremendous *ad captandum* speech from Dr. Bellair, who inveighed passionately against the insecurity and danger of circumstantial evidence, and defied the magistrates to connect his client personally with the deed which had been committed.

'The Bench desire to remind you, Dr.

Bellair,' at length said the Commissioner, 'that we are only acting ministerially. This is but a preliminary proceeding. Many of your arguments, the Bench think, would have great weight with a jury, but we have made up our minds to commit. I would suggest that you are only wasting your own valuable time, and perhaps that of the Court.'

'If the Bench have made up their minds, if they are resolved, no matter what arguments may be brought forward, to take a particular, a prejudged course, I of course cannot prevent it,' said the Doctor, at a white heat. 'With regard to the closing observation of Mr. Commissioner Blake, I will observe that I bow to the decision of the Bench as to questions of law; but the assertion that I am wasting the time of the Court deals with a question of fact, concerning which I am as competent to form an opinion as any man living, be he who he may.'

Here the little man folded his arms and frowned ferociously at the Bench, presenting a not inapt likeness to a frantic terrier confronting a kennel of staghounds.

'Edward Hill Morsley,' said the Commissioner, deigning no further notice of the irate

advocate, and as he spoke the slightest sound was audible throughout the Court, 'you are not obliged to say anything, and what you say will be taken down in writing, and may be used against you at your trial. Do you desire to say anything?'

'Nothing whatever,' answered Morsley, with the most perfect *sang-froid*.

'My client reserves his defence,' said the Doctor defiantly.

'Edward Hill Morsley,' again said the Commissioner, in measured and grave accents, 'you stand committed to take your trial for wilful murder at the next ensuing Assize Court, to be holden at Russell on the 20th January next.

'Call up the witnesses, Sergeant M'Mahon, and let them be duly bound over to appear.'

This was done.

The prisoner was removed, amid the muttered execrations of the crowd, who pressed to gaze at him as he was hurried away.

The Court was adjourned, and as I and my comrades walked silently away, a load seemed lifted from my mind, in that the innocent blood that had been shed would be avenged, and no

mourning ghost, as sings the rude folk-lore of her own land, would flit over the hearthstone of poor Jane's birthplace, waiting in the midnight hour for justice denied both of God and man.

CHAPTER XXXV

With no longer any reasons for lingering at the Oxley, I accordingly made preparations for my departure at an early date. Before that event could take place, however, the farewell demonstration in my honour, which I had pledged myself to attend, was to come off. A few days still elapsed before the preparations would be finally completed. Then I should take my farewell of goldfield life; quit for ever the avocation so familiar to me, the associates among whom I had dwelt for long years, to embark afresh upon a path in life, if not new, so long untrodden that it would be virtually strange.

My heart should have bounded with delight at the idea of once more treading the soil of my native land, of mixing with my equals, beholding my kindred, enjoying the thousand-and-one luxuries of which the faint echo only reached us

occasionally through books and newspapers, or a stray denizen of those unknown far lands who appeared without notice and departed as suddenly as he came.

But though I could not give a logical denial to this chain of reasoning, the spring of my nature had been overstrained by my late misfortunes, so that no prospective pleasure of any kind seemed to me possible. What might happen when I had fairly cut adrift from my present surroundings I could only dimly conjecture. I was willing, nay, languidly eager to change the scene, but entirely reckless as to the consequences.

To all my other griefs were added the crowning misery that I had not heard one single word from Ruth since the last letter upon which I had founded so large a superstructure of hope and gladness. What was I to think of this continued silence? I could not believe that the whole family had cast me off without another word. The Squire, choleric as he occasionally showed himself, was far too high-bred to have omitted to acknowledge the circumstantial narrative which I had so patiently compiled in my defence.

But if not so, how was this persistent pro-

tracted silence to be accounted for; what could have happened? I knew, or thought I knew, the unwavering loyalty of my darling's nature, not less firm than gentle, though loyal to parental sway. Had long-borne anguish of mind proved too harsh a trial for that delicate frame, fit casket for the ethereal spirit which it clothed? Had she passed from earth? And had her parents, agonised with hopeless grief, been too careless of forms and ceremonies to put upon record the unutterable sorrow to which they dwelt ever a prey and a sacrifice?

Or had absence and doubt, with parental pressure added, sufficed, as in hundreds of cases which I had known or heard of, to sway the girlish determination; to invest a newly accredited suitor with the charm and glamour which once were the privilege of one alone? Who could say? All things were possible during absence and misconstruction. I deemed that I had good cause to be aweary of my life—to loathe the sight of the sun.

Sadly resigned to the approaching *fête* in my honour, I took but little heed of the great preparations which were proceeding at a rate which interested Mrs. Yorke deeply, and caused

quite a sensation in the immediate neighbourhood of our claim. That worthy matron had just been up to town to make some purchases at Mrs. Mangrove's store, and had brought back the most astounding rumour. The Commissioner was to take the chair at the dinner; all the magistrates were to be there; all the legal gentlemen, among whom Dr. Bellair and Mr. Markham would allegorically couch together, even as the lion and the lamb. Nearly all the business men and every miner of mark on the field had taken tickets. There had been nothing like it since the great Sunday-school gathering in Verjill's paddock last Michaelmas Day. Everybody was talking about it, and Mrs. Mangrove said she was going to listen to the speeches, and she, Mrs. Yorke, would do so too.

Kind-hearted Mrs. Yorke's prattlings did not particularly raise my spirits, and I shrank from a festive gathering and the after-dinner florid eloquence, which I did not doubt would take place. Nevertheless, I would go through with it. And, after all, was it not as well to have a permanent record of the universal goodwill and confidence of the most respectable inhabitants of the district, showing their entire

belief in my innocence of the charge laid at my door?

I had strolled down a mile or two towards the lower end of the 'lead,' on the upper part of which we were working, and was calming my mind with the contemplation of the far-off pearly sky-line with its crimson shafts and quivering lances of tremulous flame, when, as I passed along a narrow street, my attention was aroused by a small crowd. Angry voices, one a woman's, rose in tones of altercation.

I felt more than half inclined to retreat, but the old feeling, which always impelled me forward in such cases, was still strong within me, and I obeyed it.

To my very great surprise I saw that the disputants were Algernon Malgrade and Dolores. Both were excited beyond all bounds of restraint which ordinarily could have controlled such temperaments. Her nature was, I know, passionate and tempestuous, uncontrollable as that of the roused tigress. He, to do him justice, would not have committed himself to an unseemly brawl in the open streets, but he had been drinking—his face was darkly flushed, and his utterance thick. There

was no want of steadiness in his movements, but I knew that he must indeed have been drinking hard, and not for one day only, to have brought himself to this condition. He was savage and reckless in consequence, and having had, as he thought, some occasion of complaint against Dolores, had given rein to his brutal nature and beaten her.

She, as before, was most wildly excited, shrieking aloud, calling down the vengeance of heaven upon him for his cruelty and injustice, and upon herself for her weakness in ever attaching herself to so detestable a villain, cursing with dreadful intensity the hour she was born and that in which she had first set eyes upon him.

All this was uttered rapidly and emphatically in a loud voice, with the excited gestures and vehement action which belonged of right to her hot southern blood. A crowd had gathered, evidently sympathising with her wrongs. Anything more distasteful to all the instincts of a man like Malgrade, low as he had fallen, dulled and deteriorated as was even now his every moral sense, could not have been imagined.

'Stand out of the way, you fools,' he said, in a voice trembling with rage, and with a look which caused those nearest to him to draw back rapidly without further warning; 'and you, you jade, come home if you don't wish me to knock your brains out where you stand. Can't we have a few words without your calling all the field to share it, and making as much noise as if you'd hired the bellman for a roll-up? Come home, I say.'

His words were more or less jocular as he advanced towards her; but whether the miserable woman distrusted him, or feared a repetition of his unmanly violence, or whether, thoroughly exasperated, she had become utterly reckless, no one can tell.

'Don't come near me,' she said, in a strange and lowered tone. 'I made a vow before, but this one I'll keep. If you lay a hand on me, you never were in such peril of your life since —since—you——'

Seemingly anxious to stop her mouth, fearful that she might repeat something dangerously near the truth, Malgrade was apparently incapable of further restraining himself. He muttered something and rushed towards her as if with

some violent intention. As he approached she drew backward, still facing him, until she reached the open door of the shop—that of a butcher—opposite to which, in the long street which traversed that suburb, the altercation had commenced. In retreating she was arrested by the large butcher's block which stood just inside the doorway. She glanced at it with lightning-like rapidity. On it lay several knives. She snatched up the largest, sharply pointed and keen edged, and, making one desperate lunge at her pursuer, buried it to the hilt in his body. He threw up his arms; one spasm contorted his features; his eyes stared, widely opened but unconscious. Then he fell forward, prone and motionless, at the very feet of the angry woman. The jaw dropped. Algernon Malgrade was a dead man.

Casting off my lethargy, I bounded to the spot. The features had resumed their habitual calm. Blood was flowing from a deep small wound immediately under the right ribs. He who but a minute before was my enemy, her oppressor, was now a lump of lifeless clay.

With all the inconsistency of her sex, Dolores—the moment the deed was done, and

he whom with all his faults she, ay, so many women, had loved, lay dead before her eyes, slain by her own hands — threw down the blood-stained weapon, and, with a curdling shriek, cast herself on her knees by his side, imploring him to speak but one word, and calling him by every fond and endearing name.

The crowd which had closed around the corpse here opened to make a passage for Dr. Bolton, who being in the neighbourhood had been skilfully captured by an active young constable on duty and brought to the spot.

He looked calmly and all unmoved upon the frantic woman, the curious crowd, and the calm face of the dead man.

'Why, Pole,' he said, 'you and I appear to come in for more than our fair share of tragedies. Deep incised wound, ex-act-ly above the region of the liver; couldn't have been more accurate in her anatomy if she had tried. Subject dead; not the least use in remaining. Death must have been instantaneous. Constable Dickson, have the goodness to inform the coroner that I shall be at his service at three o'clock P.M. Better lock up that poor Dolores, or she'll do

herself an injury. Nervous twitching of the muscles of the face, incipient dementia. Good-morning.'

This terribly tragic occurrence almost again unhinged my nervous system, although at the proceedings which necessarily followed I was fortunately spared personal reference. There was a cloud of witnesses beside me; so that at the coroner's inquest, which terminated in a verdict of manslaughter as against the miserable woman whom Malgrade had driven by his ill-treatment to the rash deed, I was not called. She was of course committed to take her trial at the next assizes, her fate being in some inscrutable way destined to be again mixed up with my name. For she had unwittingly been the instrument of vengeance against the man who of all others had set himself most deliberately to work me evil. He had succeeded in part, as one's enemies often do in this world. But his punishment — was it the lottery of fortune or retribution?—had come upon him swiftly and irrevocably. How strangely ordered apparently that Morsley should be lying in gaol charged with the murder of his wife, while his principal ally, coadjutor in many an

evil deed, lay dead by the hand of a wronged and insulted woman. I believe *now* that Malgrade was in some form or other connected with the murder of poor Jane. Either that he had supplied the information as to the exact time of her starting in the coach to Sydney, or that he had known that Morsley came up to the hotel that night with murder in his heart. Cautious as Malgrade was ordinarily, I believe that he would have dissuaded his more savage companion from open outrage, but his intensely malignant feeling towards me, deepened since our conflict, held him back from interfering.

Yes, I had been avenged on mine enemies. Swiftly, too, had the wheel of destiny turned, far more so than is often given to wondering man to witness with awe-stricken submission. One lay within prison walls, whence the chance was slight that he should ever again see the blue vault of heaven, save on the day when he was brought forth to die. And Algernon Malgrade, whom but a few short hours since I had seen serene, smiling, scornful as of old, apparently defiant of all men as of the Lord on high, lay dead by a woman's hand in a street brawl.

And this was the end of the handsome, well-

born, cultured aristocrat, whom I well remembered meeting for the first time at Woolwich, when, as a military cadet, he was the pride of his family, the idol of doting relatives. Clever, brave, accomplished, popular, there lacked nothing apparently which goes to make one of the most successful men of the age.

Lacked there nothing? Yes, one thing might have been wanting. The key-stone of the arch, supporting the fair edifice which now lay prone and ruined. Algernon Malgrade had never possessed a *heart*. Callous to the claims of others, and habitually self-indulgent from boyhood, the moral sense, originally feeble, had been by degrees totally obliterated. He had lived for long years a life utterly devoted to sensual gratifications, stoically indifferent to the feelings, the interests, the lives even, of all who might cross his path.

And now, the victim of his own base passions had perished by the hand of a companion in evil, whose soul he had dragged down into even deeper degradation than her own reckless courses might have sought out.

Dolores had spoken truly at the time of our encounter when she said it would be better for

both of them if they never again met. She was his fate, though then he knew it not. And his death was virtually hers. For upon the trial her manner so obviously told of a mind diseased that by direction of the jury she was sent to a lunatic asylum, where the sad remnants of humanity, once known in their perfection as the beautiful Dolores Lusada, passed from mortal ken.

. . . . . .

The dinner given in my honour was indeed a very grand celebration in its way, perhaps, excepting the Sunday-school picnic alluded to, and the Chinese riot, the very largest and most popular demonstration known since the opening of the goldfield.

In conjunction with a natural regret at the departure of a comrade, there was no doubt a widely-felt desire to convince me that the popular sympathy was wholly with me in the matter of my trial and unjust incarceration. And in this sentiment all classes, all orders and conditions of men, appeared to share, from the Commissioner to the bellman.

At a certain hour, late in the afternoon, I walked up to the long room at Hennessy's, the

very apartment indeed in which Jack Bulder had transacted his delirium. That worthy and energetic personage now accompanied me, as also the Major, Olivera, and my true follower and henchman Joe. They formed a sort of bodyguard on the present occasion, as did the sons of Torquil of the Oak to the youthful and lucklessly irresolute chieftain of the Clan Quhele.

In the room above referred to were about a hundred and fifty persons assembled, while the gallery was filled with the feminine contingent, who had mustered in great force, in order to witness the ceremonial and hear the speeches.

It would be easy and apparently natural to say that all this kind of thing is a bore and an infliction that people would decline thankfully were the opportunity afforded. But few men are so constituted as to be totally indifferent to the nature of the feeling with which they are regarded by any community in which they have long resided. And when, in spontaneous unbought goodwill, an attempt is made to formulate the silent opinion of character and conduct which has grown up in the course of

years, cold must be the heart, and strangely impervious to the strongest natural impulses of humanity, that is not stirred to sympathetic appreciation and manly gratefulness.

Calmly, well-nigh indifferently, as I had schooled myself to regard this demonstration from a distance, when I looked around the room and saw the stalwart forms of the representative miners from many a well-known locality, men of worth among their fellows and of trans-Australian celebrity—I saw the officials, the lawyers, the magistrates, the tradespeople, even some of the lowest members of the community, brought there by approval and pure goodwill alone—my heart swelled and seemed for a moment nigh bursting when I thought I should see their faces no more.

The Commissioner stepped forward on my entrance with his usual prompt initiative, and thus spoke—

'Mr. Hereward Pole, I have been deputed by the gentlemen here assembled, representing, I am pleased to see, all classes of residents upon the goldfield and its vicinity, to present you with an address, in which sincere regret is expressed for your approaching departure,

approbation of your conduct as a miner, a man, and a citizen, during the years of your residence among us, coupled with the fullest sympathy in the matter of the late unhappy occurrences, to which I will not further allude. This address concludes with an earnest hope that your visit to Europe may be productive of lasting happiness, and that all good fortune may be in store for you which your sincere friends on this goldfield can desire.'

Then the address, handsomely engrossed and illuminated upon vellum, and containing more than a thousand signatures, was handed to me by Captain Blake.

I read my reply, in which I thanked all my very good and true friends of the Oxley for the warm-hearted and encouraging manner in which they had supported me in the days of my adversity. I could hardly express my sense of the delicacy which they had shown in arranging that I should leave the Oxley fresh from receiving evidence of their kindness and goodwill. This token and expression of their faith in me I should treasure and value to my life's end. On the goldfields, working among them, I had always, despite of adverse circumstances,

been happy and contented, and I assuredly should recall with pleasure all the days of my life the manly character of the miners of the Oxley and Yatala. I again thanked them for thus ending my sojourn among them in a manner so honourable and satisfactory.

I really had great difficulty in reading my humble composition. In spite of all attempts at steady self-control, my voice would falter as I thought how I had been forgotten by my friends and kindred, renounced by my plighted love, and cast off by her parents; how I had been apparently abandoned by God and man—left to the tender mercies of my enemies. Yet the men around me, merely comrades in toil and privation, many of them rude of speech, and such as at one time I should have thought shame to have associated with, had stood by me staunchly, and had nobly, delicately, considerately thus assured me of their firm faith in manhood and in my innocence. Such are truly periods in men's lives far beyond the reach of ordinary words, ordinary emotion. One of these supreme moments I felt this to be, and my heart welled over with genuine gratitude as it tremulously responded to the appeal.

Host Hennessy, according to the *Beacon*, displayed his well-known administrative powers which, combined with an exceptionally *recherché cuisine*, had raised his establishment to its well-deserved intercolonial pre-eminence. However that may have been, there was a very creditable display of matters edible and potable, particularly the latter. Wild and tame turkeys were plentiful at the Oxley, and the highly respectable wild-fowl known as the wild duck—the 'canvas-back' of Australia—were as the sands of the sea-shore. Barons of beef and saddles of mutton preserved the British flavour of the entertainment. Kangaroo-tail and ox-tail soup disputed pre-eminence; but according to Merlin and the Major, who were both authorities, the dinner was extremely well cooked and well served. The claret and hock, sauterne and champagne, with the other wines in ordinary use, had been specially selected by the committee, and were such as no reasonable gourmet, especially in such hot weather, could find a word to say against. After a fair amount of law had been granted for the exercise of the knife and fork, the chairman, Commissioner Blake, arose and requested attention to the

usual loyal and formal toasts to which are granted precedence in all gatherings of Britons. In due time he requested all glasses to be filled, as he was about to propose the health of the guest of the evening.

'When I mention the name of Hereward Pole,' he said, 'you will agree with me, gentlemen, that we are met to-night to do honour to no unknown man. He has dwelt among us for years, and as a man, a miner, a citizen, and a gentleman, he has fully entitled himself to our genuine respect and cordial liking. He has shown by his consistent behaviour on this goldfield that it is possible, while working like a man, to live like a gentleman. (Loud cheers.) He has, as you know, staunchly performed his daily labour in the mine. He has never in any way declined association with the respectable and intelligent miners of the goldfield. Yet he has lived in all essentials as truly the life of a gentleman as if he had occupied chambers in the Albany and had taken his daily promenade in the parks of Rotten Row—ay, more so, far more so, if honourable labour be placed before indolent self-indulgence, the soldier in the camp before the courtier in the palace. That there

are others I am aware, many others, equally well born, well educated, well conducted, among the great army of industry, which I am proud after a fashion to rule over. Such men, as long as they are true to themselves, will always be treated with all proper respect by their fellow-miners who have not had the same early advantages. They were indeed more popular for being gentlemen by birth than otherwise. A manly workman, no matter what his occupation might be, was always proud and pleased to associate with a comrade better instructed than himself. The benefit was mutual, and mutually recognised. Turning from these considerations, which, however, had impressed themselves upon his mind during a lengthened experience, he would call upon the gentlemen assembled, residents of all classes upon the goldfield, to confirm his statement, that no miner more respected and generally popular than their guest had ever bade them farewell. He remembered him when he and his friends, Major Treseder and Mr. Joseph Bulder and the late Mr. Cyrus Yorke, commenced mining at Yatala. Their conduct had always been honourable, straightforward, and manly. One and all in

the claim had made good their title to be so esteemed. And no one grudged them the remarkable, the well-deserved success they had attained. (Loud cheers.) He would allude, and but lightly, to a subject which would always have a thrilling interest for their guest. It would be painful, but he had a reason for speaking. A grave criminal charge had been brought against Mr. Pole. Circumstances had led to his being arrested and tried on that charge. He had been discharged, having been thoroughly cleared from all suspicion, even the slightest. They were here to-night representing every class in the community—official, commercial, and industrial—and as one man it would now go forth that they affirmed the perfect blamelessness of Mr. Pole throughout the whole affair. He had acted with an unselfish generosity and pure friendliness which was not often paralleled, and they—men of the world as most of them were—were proud, for the honour of human nature, to testify to their admiration of Mr. Pole's manly conduct throughout the whole affair.'

Long and enthusiastic cheering resounded after Blake concluded his peroration, wherein he

wished me all the gratification the Old World could furnish to the fresh powers of enjoyment which I should bear from the regions of the New. In which pleasure pursuit he heartily wished that he could accompany me.

If the amount of good feeling then and there existent in my case was to be measured by the heartiness of the applause which greeted the conclusion of the Captain's speech, and the sincerity of the contempt with which heel-taps were avoided, I was that night one of the most popular and well-beloved individuals south of the line. It was some considerable time before it all came to an end—a large number of my quondam pick-and-shovel acquaintances being specially anxious to catch my eye before draining their glasses to my health and long life.

When matters had settled themselves somewhat I returned thanks as follows—

'Friends and fellow-miners, I stand up with the feeling that it is most likely the last time that we shall look upon each other's faces. Thus I feel impelled to speak out with perfect unreserve the feelings of my heart. Those among you who are miners—and it is as a

miner only that I wish you to look upon me now—have had that opportunity of knowing me which years of association of similar labour done within each other's sight can give, and alone can give. In such a life no man can hide his nature, his character, from his fellows. They know his manner of speech, his acts, almost his thoughts. His life is as a scroll spread out for their inspection. If they believe the record to be true, honest, manly—always making due allowance for the weaknesses of human nature—they will be good comrades to him. They will be friendly and courteous in prosperity, in adversity they will stand by him like brothers—ay, as a man's own kindred often do not stand by him. It matters not whether his rearing or theirs may have been different, his former surroundings, his social position; if he has come up to their standard of manliness and honourable dealing during his career on a goldfield, the miners of Australia will yield him that respect, that cordial goodwill, and that help in his sore need which is unknown, I believe, among any other body of men. I have lived to experience the truth of what I am saying in my own person and in my own cir-

cumstances, some of which have been, as you all know, painful and unfortunate to the last degree. But I wish you all now to believe, if it is any satisfaction to you, that I have been supported and encouraged more than I should have thought possible by the kindness and manly sympathy of the miners of the Oxley goldfield. When I leave, as I intend to do on the morrow, never to return, I shall carry away in my heart the undying remembrance of kindness received from all classes of the people among whom I have lived and toiled, on the whole happily. I thank my friend, and your friend, the Commissioner, for the generous way in which he has been pleased to allude to my mining career and character; and I beg of you all to look upon Hereward Pole, wherever he may be, as a comrade and a friend.'

When I concluded it seemed as if everybody was more or less affected with the sadness of farewell sentiments. Mrs. Mangrove and Mrs. Yorke, with some of their acquaintances in the gallery, were all sobbing audibly, while even the guests, hardened as they might have been supposed to be against the softer influences, looked rather lugubrious. This was brought to

a close by Mr. Bagstock, who, perceiving a change of programme to be necessary, took occasion to rise and propose the health of 'the unsuccessful miners'—an idea which took immensely, and speedily restored hilarity. It was responded to by Olivera, who declared his belief in the ultimate good fortune of the class—say in twenty or thirty years—with such gravity that it produced fresh bursts of laughter.

CHAPTER XXXVI

EARLY next morning I quitted the Oxley for ever, perhaps, and turned my face southwards. The journey was this time truly uneventful, and I found myself on the third morning once more in that picturesque city which the sea-roving Anglo-Saxon has reared on the strand of the peerless Haven of the South.

How divine a sensation, how blessed a relief was it to my worn spirit to lounge aimlessly adown the crowded streets, and permit the novel units of the surging crowd to imprint themselves half mechanically upon my brain. Of all rests and solaces, surely none is greater, more efficacious, than the abiding for a season in a city of strangers, where no man bids you greeting, where none disturb the mystic peopled solitude in which the spirit bathes and revels.

The ordinary adjuncts of civilisation were

to me an aspect fresh and fascinating beyond description.

The season was that of midsummer, often arid and desert-bare in Australia, but the showers which the sun distils from the clouds which flit across the broad bosom of the Pacific had refreshed the groves and gardens which line the shores and heights. The verdurous glades were emerald green between the flower thickets; the air was heavy with the perfumes of a thousand gardens and orange groves; and the nights, jewelled and bedecked with the lustrous stars that shine wide-glittering around the Southern Cross, were to me almost magically full of restful harmony from the measured rhythm of the surges which rolled their soft murmurous monotones beside my couch.

As a matter of strict business I transferred my funds to the head office of the Bank of New Holland, which amounted to fifty-three thousand some odd hundreds of pounds sterling. I also made arrangements for the periodical payments to the credit of my bank account of such moneys as might result from the periodical 'washings-up' of No. 4 and Greenstone Dyke. These were to be my last mining ventures. I

was too loyal to the sentiment of my order to relinquish my interest in the good claims that had done so much for my partners and myself. But I did not intend to tempt fortune again, or, as far as I could control my destiny, have another hour's work or anxiety about money as long as my life lasted.

Whatever might be my future course on the ocean of fate on which, after this pleasant island sojourn to refit, my bark was likely to drift so aimlessly, I intended to preserve myself from the sordid cares which eat up the heart of man —'the rust and moth which corrupt' but too often the best treasures of existence.

After a short but satisfactory interview with my banker, who, studiously affable and courteous, assured me that the whole civilised world of finance was deeply interested in the progress and prospects of the Oxley, I proceeded to attire myself once more in accordance with the family tradition of my order, and to that end placed myself unreservedly in the hands of Mr. Knolley, the Poole of Sydney.

He must have justified my confidence; for a week afterwards, as I took my afternoon stroll down George Street after a morning spent in

some more pronounced exercise, I could hardly resist the conclusion that the well-dressed, hatted, booted, gloved individual whom I encountered suddenly in a gigantic mirror of Palmer's palace of silken sheen, and drew back respectfully from, must be somebody else, certainly not Hereward Pole, late of No. 4.

By degrees I became accustomed to my long-disused second self, the Hereward Pole who was wont to bow to and *causer* with ladies, to dine *à la carte* at good hotels or fashionable cafés, to mingle as of right only with persons of a certain rank and position, to be posted up in all the *petite histoire* and esoteric gossip of society, and to bear myself—so soon do use and wont effect a change—as if I had never known any other habitudes.

It is true that my face and neck were bronzed and tanned, burned deeply dark where exposed to the merciless sun of the interior wastes. And my hands were hardened and roughened out of all similarity to the delicate feminine extremities which ornament the non-manual toilers of the world. Still, I had always tended them after a fashion. Brown and muscular they might be,

yet still I flattered myself that in shape and otherwise they still indicated gentle blood. I adopted gloves with much trouble and weariness of the flesh at first, but adhered to them religiously after I found they were working wonders in the complexion of my unconventional digits.

And the sea—oh! the sea—glorious, unbounded, freshly beautiful as each sun arose, lighting up the great sandstone battlements, the scarped bastions upon which ages of storm and the unresting surge had beaten vainly. How did I draw daily fresh health and inspiration of tangible joyousness from the ocean breath, from the ever-changing various wave beauty—'from calm or storm, from rock or bay,' all savoured of the airs of Paradise, to me so long *habitans in sicco*, sojourner in the monotoned wastes of the great Gold Desert. Ah! if but she, my ill-fated friend and companion, had been permitted by a tender Providence to have made this the first stage on her homeward-bound path of love and duty. But it had been ordered otherwise. And though at times the terrible scene in which I had borne a part came as freshly back to my mind as if the whole

occurrence was stereotyped amid the nerve tracks of my brain, yet the impression waxed feeble with each repetition—thanks to that very feebleness of our nature which so often acts as a safeguard from the persistent arrows of remorse, the undying bitterness of a haunting memory.

I had selected for my residence a well-known principal hotel, situated in what was once a fashionable portion of the city proper, but long since abandoned to wharves, warehouses, and strictly mercantile purposes. In the good old days when Sydney was a green-swarded town, with a growing coast and island trade, and about thirty thousand inhabitants, here dwelt some of the leading colonists and merchants. Here they built themselves handsome freestone houses, with noble verandahs and balconies and Moorish-looking high-walled gardens, within which grew the banana and the orange, the loquat and the guava, in tropical luxuriance and profusion. These pleasantly-secluded retreats were towered over by the great fronds of the *Araucaria excelsa*, and often in the clear summer nights, lights and music, graceful flitting shapes, and rippling laughter mingled effects

with the gleaming waters of the bay and the murmuring wave.

But all these things had passed away with the *bon vieux temps* that is bewailed everywhere and which returns no more. The merchants had become too rich to live among the haunts of commerce; they had migrated to more newly fashionable suburbs, or sailed away across the sea to lose themselves in older agglomerations of realised wealth and restless hyper-civilisation. The gardens had become too valuable as town allotments to be devoted longer to bananas and araucarias. So the walls—old, true, massive walls, such as we see in Italian and Spanish cities, behind which dark-eyed damsels wait languorous and expectant for the soft-hued eve—were pulled down. The glorious spreading trees were ruthlessly felled or rooted up—the Southern Dryads notwithstanding—and the sacred soil auctioned at per foot to make way for a mushroom eruption of stucco terraces and panel-gilt villas.

One of these fine old lofty, many-roomed, double-verandahed mansions, carefully constructed of great freestone blocks, when labour was cheap and leisure abundant, had been

utilised for the use of strangers and pilgrims, and was known as Batty's Hotel. It enjoyed a wide free view over the bay and islets of Sydney Harbour, while from the upper balconies were visible the grand and towering masses of the North and South Heads—frowning lofty sandstone capes, through which, by an entrance comparatively narrow and apparently more so than in reality, the great liners, the hugh ocean steamers, the white-sailed fleet of coasters and seagull-fashioned yachts, could be seen threading their way into the noblest, safest, most picturesque harbour in the southern hemisphere, in the British possessions, in the known world.

This was one of my favourite bits of amusement and occupation when I was not sitting or lying on the short thick doub grass turf which lined the paved but disused streets which led down to the old wharf and to the water's edge generally. Here I would lie by the hour gazing at the moss-grown steps, with heavy iron rings rusting and unused, wherever the light pleasure boats, the gondolas of the South, were wont to be moored. In this new land the necessary scarcity of ruins makes all edifices that

savour of decay or vanished greatness inexpressibly touching to the contemplative wayfarer. In imagination I wove romances which fitted the circumstance of their crumbling porticoes and trade-encumbered apartments, far otherwise occupied in the past. I felt myself cast for the part henceforth of a dreamer, a spectator only in the theatre of life. My career as an actor, as a probable *jeune premier*, was past—irrecoverably past. Henceforth I should sit mute, anonymous, in an unnoticed back seat, listening all unamused to dialogue, the music, the oft-repeated *dénouement*, until eyes grew dim and hearing dulled with age.

It was a dreary prospect, but what other could I hope to realise? Mine was not the spirit of tireless philanthropy, which could go on toiling for the benefit of the race without enthusiasm yet without cessation—*ohne Hast*e, *ohne Rast*e—till the worn frame and wearied mind lapsed simultaneously.

No! I had not so learned the gospel of life, neither had I practically come to believe that human beings were in a general way much the better for being helped. The world was full of shams and impostors as it was. A large indis-

criminating charity only created its own environment of beggars and alms-recipients, as in old times the abbey produced its crop of sturdy beggars, as the mushroom springs up from the suddenly enriched and newly watered soil. When I felt aweary of the purely sensuous, harmless, convalescent existence that I was at present leading, I could put myself on board a mail steamer, and perhaps brace myself to active virtue in the sterner clime of the historic North.

There was one of these anachronistic mansions which I particularly affected, appealing as it did in the character and beauty of its architecture and surroundings at once to my surviving æsthetic tastes and to the loneliness of my present circumstances; built upon the natural terrace which sloped upward from a lovely and secluded bay, and girt by a larger area of grounds, in which a small portion of the primeval wilderness, left wholly undisturbed, had been most artistically blended with every horticultural device which could heighten the beauties of nature.

Much attached to the sight from early association and other reasons, the proprietors,

colonists of high consideration and great wealth, had long resisted the encroaching tide of mere commercial enhancement of values which had threatened to swallow up their cherished heritage.

At length, however, the golden flood could be dammed back no longer, an enormous price had been accepted for the property. The mansion had been cleared of furniture and now lay untenanted. The grounds were no longer 'kept up,' and though no actual outrage upon the long-sacred privacy of the demesne had taken place, the sentence had gone forth and Charlotte Bay was doomed.

There was something in the façade of the house—a noble mansion in the Elizabethan style, built of pale, pink-veined, creamy freestone—that strangely reminded me of Allerton Court. Otherwise there were no characteristic features in common. But memory has a thousand strange ever-recurring links and tentacles which cause the heart to stir and tremble at the merest chance symbols, to others meaningless as the mid-day sun, the evening breeze.

In this particular instance, I had no sooner

set eyes upon the imposing, almost feudal-seeming pile, standing in lonely grandeur amid the strange semi-tropical woodlands, than the memories of Allerton Court flashed before me with such suddenness and strength that I could scarce control the impulse that urged me to passionate exclamation. So vividly before me

> 'The old mansion and the accustomed hall,
> And the remembered chambers and the place,
> The day, the hour, the sunshine, and the shade,
> And she, who was his destiny, came back,'

that I sank down upon one of the carved stone benches beneath the gloom-greenery of a vast wild fig-tree, which had power to eclipse the bright noonday sun; sat down and groaned aloud in freshly-summoned agony of spirit.

Long did I sit there, half reclining in the deep shade and solitude well-nigh as perfect as when, in the previous century, the pre-Adamite savage crept through the interlaced boughs in pursuit of the wild-wood game. Long hours passed ere my throbbing heart commenced to be at rest, and the paroxysms of my keen-edged regretful memories to be lulled. When I arose the sun was sinking, the westward flame-pageants visible in dimly-burning gold behind

the waving spires of the tall feathery-stemmed Indian bamboo. Birds were calling to each other from haunts deep in these rarely disturbed solitudes, curiously near as they were to the hum and bustle of a large city. Slowly I moved homewards. The waters of the bay, seen over the parapet of a low stone wall, without intervening break of fence or building, seemed magically mirrored into silver, gem flashing with the sunset cloud pageant. Sullenly frowning down upon the placid glories of sea and sky, reared itself Titan-like the great North Head. I paced along a winding avenue leading to the outer gate. It was a garden of Armida. Above, below, around were masses of brightly-flowering tropical shrubs. Palm trees were mingled with the strange pale-foliaged trees, the eucalyptus, casuarina, and banksia. The earliest discoverers had found and named the very spot. A stone bridge, itself almost venerable with age, and clasped with close lianas, spanned a narrow creek which ran under great fern fronds and evergreen moss-velvet bars plashingly to the sea. Insensibly the beauty of the hour, the fairy-like strangeness and charm of the surroundings, acted as an

anodyne to my tortured spirit, and when I debouched from these sacred groves, as they seemed to me, on to the red gravelled undulating highway, I felt like one who had been redeemed from his appointed sojourn in Elf-land, and from whose eyes the glamour had fled for aye.

So strong, however, was the impression left upon me that on the morrow and each succeeding day I sought the same enchanted spot, and spent amid its shadowy lawns and sunless retreats the long bright hours of the summer day. The sultry eve, which in that southern clime lengthens far into the silent, clear-hued, starry night, often found me still unwilling to change the realm of fancy for the abode of men.

I had made myself known to the under-gardener, who alone lived on the premises, chiefly as a watch against thieves and tramps. By a liberal douceur I had fixed myself among his mental machinery as primarily a species of harmless lunatic prone to insensate wanderings, but secondarily as the possessor of good clothes and current coin, therefore well-intentioned and worthy of toleration.

Thus, though we seldom interchanged a

word, an armistice, even an acquaintance, was arranged and ratified between us. I was suffered to roam unheeded through every secluded nook, every natural fastness, every artificial addendum and improvement to the grounds. I came to know at length every feature of the ample-seeming demesne, from the cave in the natural sandstone rock, the fish-pond and the fernery, the bath-grotto and the sea-wall, to the lawns, where strange flowering bulbs grew among the close-shorn grass, appearing annually as regularly as the season, and yet with no record of their original introduction. I knew every banana tree, the broad, delicate, pale green fronds of which were alone to be seen unbroken and of perfect shape in that sheltered segment of Paradise. I knew the birds which dwelt amid the leafy thickets and darkly-shaded recesses; they built tame and unharmed as if on an uninhabited island in the South Seas. As I lay luxuriously day-dreaming in the mimic wilderness to which I had become so strangely attracted, deeper and yet more deep became the feeling daily that in some mysterious way this lonely romantic mansion, these picturesque fragments of a world

foreign to all the prosaic realities of a sordid modern life, were connected with my destiny and that of her who had been during all these weary years a loadstone and a beacon-light to my heart—to my innermost soul.

Yes, Ruth, love and worship had alike centred in thee. Storm-clouds might have obscured thy divinely clear effulgence, gross earthly vapours might have mingled with the ethereal essence of my spirit homage, but thine image and thine only has ever been shrined in this heart.

As the summer days drew on and the shadows lengthened, I made my way for the most part to the boat wharf or jetty, which, constructed of huge blocks of rough sandstone, had been run out into deep water over the shelving sands. This piece of simple engineering interested me greatly. I loved to lie at length upon the cool flags or sit upon the steps at the end and think of how long since the trim delicately-fashioned yachts lay at anchor close to it, while adown these very steps, now all unused and moss-grown, had light feet tripped, while musical voices and the gay converse of youth sounded where now alone the wavelets

of the rising tide plashed mournfully, or the wheeling sea-bird shrilly screamed.

Hour after hour would I lie at length watching the sunset hues as they gradually paled, and the bright tints died out of the sky, as from a human face the warm tints when pain or grief has sapped the sources of the blood; the evening breeze, as it stole whisperingly through the darkening shades, stirring the leaves which fell not the winter through, and fretting the silver surface of the great water-plain which lay so still and solemn under the star lamps as they gradually grew into golden fire from the pale shimmering lights which faintly trembled into being amid the azure depths.

Calmness, repose,—soothing, consoling to a degree unutterable,—did I find there in the long vigils which I ever and anon kept, rousing myself with difficulty at midnight and pacing dreamily back to my hotel. As the days wore on and the year had entered upon its second month, that one which is esteemed of the highest in temperature, the most scorchingly severe even in the fierce summer of the South, I felt that my spirit had entered upon a fresh stage of existence, that I had acquired anew

the strength and endurance of ill which would enable me to recreate the fragments of my long-past trust in a beneficent Providence.

Gradually, in these day-dreams and midnight musings, there came to me an immeasurably deep and solemn conviction of the folly of resisting the immutable decrees of Fate. What was I—what was a nation of such atoms in the sight of the Omnipotent—that one should dare to complain of the preordained, eternally immutable course of events? Were the colossal forces of Nature, the dread laws of existence which governed the immensities and eternities, to be set aside that such an ephemeris as I should sport its hour in the sun? What were all the ills of life compared with the furies which were evolved from a man's own conscience? These I could confront with clearest countenance. For the rest, let worse or better come, I was prepared for all.

CHAPTER XXXVII

One sultry morn, according to my custom, I sought my favourite haunt, to which I now considered myself to hold a kind of title, and lay dreamily upon the shaded greensward in true southern *abandon*. During the earlier part of the day the heat had been intense; and as I thought of the parched uplands of the Oxley, at that season so burning and breezeless, I wondered how I could have endured so long the Sahara-like summers which there prevailed. Here, in this wondrous Eden shade, all sun-glare was banished; the sun-rays seemed only to penetrate the leafy screen to be transmuted into the languorous summer warmth that was free from all tinge of earthly discomfort—a lotus-eating, luxurious sensation, nothing more.

Noon had long passed. The ocean breeze

came sighing over the burnished wavelets, the yellow shore, the silent groves. All nature hasted to revive and revel in the approach of eve. I had strolled out to my station on the end of the stone pier, and mechanically gazed at one of the ocean liners which had arrived that day from Europe, and was anchored at no great distance.

I fell to speculating idly upon the intentions and probable projects of the passengers, who were even now commencing the long, and perchance wearisome, sojourn of colonisation. Were they doubting and fearing, or hoping all things, even as I had done in the same long-past period which I could so distinctly remember? Then I saw a boat put off from the ship and row towards the shore.

It was an eve superb in tropical beauty—such a one surely that, if placed with absolute correctness upon canvas, would provoke the taunts of those critics who condemn all apparent richness of colouring as unnaturally heightened, and thus false to nature. The numberless tiny headlands, wooded or greenswarded, with shining waveless bays nestled between, harbours for fairy fleets, the long incline of groves and

gardens, the lawns and terraces of which in so many instances seemed crowded, as in old Italian pictures, to the sea-rim, presenting in their half-wild, half-cultured condition the effective contrasts of a new land. The tall araucarias stood columnar on every height, giving dignity and ordered beauty to the landscape. The white walls of stately mansions and trim villas gleamed freshly bright among the dim woods, shining like Grecian temples in the olden days of earth's glory; while, as the western sky became gradually empurpled and aflame with the gorgeous pageantry of the dying sun, an unearthly brilliancy appeared to illumine the scene, more akin to theatrical effects of light and colour than the mere summer splendour of the hour.

As the boat was rowed, a fairy bark through a gold-empurpled sea, to the shore, being steered, as it seemed to me, on a course that would bring her nearer than I at first thought to the solitary disused pier, I arose and prepared to retire, a growing dislike to strangers having become with me intensified of late.

An inexplicable feeling restrained me. I remained. I looked earnestly, fixedly, at the

occupants of the boat. Besides the crew and an officer of the ship, who steered, there were two ladies and a gentleman, an elderly man I conjectured from his way of sitting.

Whether it were fancy or not I could not tell, but they appeared to be likely to land upon the pier, *my* pier. After spending some time, with stationary boat, in looking long and with interest at Charlotte Bay House, the boat moved swiftly up to the stone steps, and the man whom I had correctly taken to be an officer of the newly-arrived vessel leaped ashore and fastened the rope in the boat's stem to an iron ring affixed to the largest block.

'This is the place,' he said. 'This is Charlotte Bay, I think the most beautiful spot in all our beautiful harbour. The pilot said it was for sale; but if it has not been sold, we shall be able to look over it. We have just time to see the house and garden, Miss Allerton, before it gets dark. Perhaps this gentleman can tell us if we are trespassing?'

At the sound of that name, of *her* name, I drew myself up with a sudden impulse, and gazed eagerly at the individuals composing the little party. An old lady, a gray-haired elderly

man of distinguished air, and a young lady walking feebly and closely veiled. Gracious Lord! Could it be? Had the God of infinite mercy and wisdom heard my prayers, and did I again behold my lost love in this half-enchanted wild, on the strange far land on which I never dreamed that her foot should press?

'No one will prevent you,' said I, quietly, to the sailor, a bright-eyed stalwart youngster, one of those gallant offshoots of the old Norse brood, whom the Motherland sends out yearly on the decks of her still increasing fleet to plant her standard and win new empires on the farthest bounds of the round world.

'The young lady wishes to see the house—a fancy of hers puts her in mind of home,' he said in explanation to me, as of a matter in which he scarcely, but for courtesy's sake, sympathised. 'Perhaps you know the paths hereabouts—they are not quite plain sailing?'

I bowed and walked ahead, closely followed by the whole party. I had felt too deeply agitated to think of making myself known as yet. I could not see her face, but I fastened my eyes on the form, the outlines of which I so well knew.

'What a beautiful house!' said the young lady, for the first time drawing up her veil. 'What a delicately-coloured stone; and oh, what a fairyland of a garden. How glad I am that we came to this country, darling mother, though I am afraid you and my father do not share all my rapture. I feel as if I must soon get well now. I am ever so much better already.'

'My darling,' said dear old Mrs. Allerton, 'your father and I live only for you. You do not need to be told that. And this certainly is a most beautiful place, and the climate deliciously mild when it is not too hot. But what made you take such a fancy to come and see this particular house? There seem to be many beautiful ones on the shores of the harbour.'

'Don't you know, mother dearest? surely you *must* see,' she said. 'Why, that part of the southern wing is just like the one at Allerton Court. It has a tiny rose garden and lawn just like the one the new gardener made for me the year *he* left England. Oh, I cannot tell why, but the feeling came over me at once as I saw it from the ship that in some sort of way connected Hereward with this house—the one I saw in my dream the week before we left England.'

'But, Ruth, dearest, you said just now that this house put you in mind of the old Court,' said the Squire.

I thought the frank face changed, the form aged, the bold, undoubting, fearless regard altered, and my heart sank as an inward monitor suggested that I was not wholly without responsibility for the decadence.

'Oh, but I told you at the time, my own good daddy, that the house I saw in my dream, where we should hear of or meet with Hereward, was like Allerton Court. Indeed, I never expected to see any house half so beautiful as this at the other side of the world. I feel convinced that this is the very place. My hope is renewed now that we may see him shortly; then all doubt will be explained and disappear.'

'God grant it,' said the Squire fervently. 'But for your health's sake, my darling, we should never have taken this long voyage, which now seems to me the wisest thing we could have done. But the stars are coming out. How large and bright they are! We must get back to our good ship. We shall be all sorry to leave her to-morrow.'

During this conversation I stood like a being

of another planet. I felt as might the fabled possessor of the ring of Gyges, as though, myself invisible, I was privileged to see the acts and hear the speech of those who were to me at present the most important personages on the earth's surface.

They knew me not. How should they in that dim half-shadowy atmosphere connect the tall bronzed muscular man with the fair-faced English stripling who had quitted England nearly seven years since?

And now my prayers had been granted, though in a way that in my blindness I had never for one moment thought of, deeming it a thing impossible that the Squire and Mrs. Allerton, representatives of those English families which seem firmly rooted as their ancestral oaks, should ever set foot upon Australian soil. Yet, though I felt a well-nigh irresistible impulse to declare myself at the first moment when the well-known voice fell like long-remembered music upon my ears—the face which to me was as that of a seraph's was again presented to my astonished gaze—yet another feeling equally strong caused me, inexplicable as it may seem, to hesitate and finally to refrain.

When Ruth's veil was lifted it was at once apparent to me that the almost transparently delicate features, the pathetic expression of the bright wistful eyes, the too slender though still graceful form, betokened but too surely the recent inroad of disease. Without doubt a happier period of change and improvement had set in, most probably with the voyage. Still I read but too plainly in the undisguised anxiety with which both the Squire and his wife regarded their charge and her every movement that but a short period must have elapsed since the most torturing phase of fear and doubt had existed for them with regard to her very life. And dared I now hazard, in whatever slight degree, that precious, that inestimable gift of heaven, the health of this fragile maiden? Had I said impulsively, 'I am Hereward Pole,' what nervous injury to an already weakened frame might not the sudden shock have produced?

No—patience and self-command must still be mine. They were to leave the vessel to-morrow, and I should have no difficulty in discovering their hotel, if indeed they did not come to Batty's and locate themselves beneath the same roof as myself.

In a few moments the plash of oars told me that they had sought the protection of the noble ship which had brought them across the ocean in safety. As favoured passengers they had been made welcome to stay during their convenience after their arrival in port. To-morrow I gathered that they had decided to establish themselves for a season in Sydney.

They had departed. I was left alone to determine upon my course. Wonderful and astonishing as were the events which had now manifested themselves, they had not confused my brain ; rather I had felt more cool and composed than at any time since the commencement of my misfortunes.

I could see it all now. Part of the history I read aright in the face of my own beloved Ruth when I had the first brief glance of her countenance at Charlotte Bay. There was graved the whole tale of my unanswered letter, of the silence and uncertainty under which I had languished so long.

This was the key to the mystery. Strong in her immortal love she had borne all too patiently, and with mute inward struggling against the gnawing worm of grief, the pangs

of doubt and fear, her brave pure spirit had been loath to succumb. Then her health had suffered, nearer and nearer still to the dark bourne had her fragile frame, the tremulous casket of the love-lamp, drifted.

The Squire had suddenly decided as the most direct and satisfactory method by which the mystery could be solved to set sail for Australia. Once there it would be comparatively easy to find out the rights of the matter. My character, my acts would be then manifested clearly. If my career had been stainless, then my name and fame would for ever be established. If not, for her sake, for all our sakes, it were better that no further doubt or hope should exist.

Their necessary preparations, though serious, were not complex or numerous. The family was small. Be sure that the Squire had the right kind of man as bailiff, by whom the property could be managed, and rents handed over to his agent. The voyage of course was long, possibly tedious. But what were wind and wave or unaccustomed travel to the fact that health and happiness might again be the portion of their beloved daughter?

It should be well understood before we take these imprudent unconventional people to task for their incredulity and indulgent weakness that they had no other aim or project in life than to see the happiness of this child of their heart's best love fully assured ere they themselves passed away. Strange as it may appear, and eccentric to the verge of lunacy, they did actually believe that mutual love, based upon simple natural predilection, would, if circumstances permitted its fruition, result in perfect happiness, or as near to that ideal condition as mortals here below ever aspire to. Money, position, fashionable brevet, rank and consideration, they had the clearness of vision to regard as the trifles in the great tragedy of human destiny. They were prepared, even if they found in Hereward Pole a toiling unsuccessful man, discouraged by ill fortune, and despairing of the long-desired goal, yet straining onward as through the dashing wave and gathering storm the seaman gazes at the swaying symbol, to stand by the promise made to him. If they had found me thus toiling honourably, poor, yet loyal to the vow in making which I left England, they would have said—

'Come back with us and be as a son in our old age; there is the love of your youth, in her eyes truth in absence is still shining. Come with us across the wandering sea. Let us see our children happy in this short life of ours, in the old home where your place is still vacant.'

So much of the end had now come. My eyes had seen the sight I had never imagined in wildest fantasy, the denizens of Allerton Court actually domiciled in the South. All was well. All was tending in the direction of my dearest hopes. On the morrow I should seek out their residence, and presenting myself before the Squire, invite him to search into the records of my goldfield life, and form his own conclusions as to the allegations made against me. I at least should not shrink from the closest scrutiny—my conscience was unclouded.

But apart from any doubt which might arise with reference to these considerations, a terrible and paralysing fear arose in my mind lest, after all, all plans and projects might come too late. What if the insidious wasting disease, the unseen foe that mocks the hues, the aspirations, the sanguine confidences of health, should prove

inexorable—if death should claim his victim even in the arms of love!

I had seen the pallor of Ruth's beloved face even in the few moments at Charlotte Bay; had noticed the slow weariness of her step—that step that was wont to be so light, so fairy-tripping adown the woodland paths of her home.

Was I doomed after all, when my earthly treasure had been borne to me across the waste of ocean, to stand sadly by and watch the gradual fading of this floweret of Paradise? What would be my agony were her pure spirit to exhale now, prematurely wafted to the realms of bliss! And what a pilgrimage would be ours were the sorrowing parents, with myself, to cross the ocean homeward-bound, with every mile of wave and foam increasing the distance between us and the grave which held all we loved or could ever again love on earth!

Then I reviewed my own prospects. Would my altered form and face have power to rekindle the torch of love, or would I find a foe in the ideal of my own personality which had so long been cherished in Ruth's gentle breast? Had the sterner traits of manhood, the traces of toil,

hard fortune, and anxiety worn away all the bright hues of youth, all the fabled graces of the halcyon time that memory unwillingly recalled? I knew not. But the very doubt caused me fresh pain.

I passed a sleepless night, and as the east slowly, almost imperceptibly, raised a bank of pearls amid the gray dim cloud-wrack, I was pacing feverishly adown the balcony watching the gray plain of ocean gradually beam into life. As the long tremulous gold line gleamed in shimmering ripples across the pale wavelets of the slumbering main, no sign of that daily miracle, the marvellous birth of dawn from night and chaos, escaped me. The life of the great city, as if painfully, awoke and stirred and laboured. Sea-birds and light, graceful boats with sails as white and speed as free, swept over the enfranchised sea-plain. A huge steamer came through the harbour portals breasting the churning waves, and throbbing as if with pride throughout her mighty frame. Power, freedom, and volition seemed granted to all but me, as if by some magic spell, upon the folding of the trailing garments of the night. I alone felt aweary of the sun, sadly distrusting

what the day had in store for me. I strolled down to one of the hermitages which once were piers and bath-houses, and casting myself recklessly into the briny water swam far out into the bay, only returning when forced to own to myself that the long swim had taxed even my practised muscles. But the tone of my nervous system was braced and renovated by the exercise, and I felt strengthened for the endurance of the day's ordeal.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

I CONSUMED the first hours of the morning in a quest among the large hotels, those modern caravanserais where the solvent stranger in a new land chiefly finds a home. To my great surprise I found no trace of the Allerton family. I sought with gradually increasing anxiety. In vain I hurried round the city at the utmost speed that my hansom cabman, stimulated by wild offers of increased payment, could sustain. Apparently no such persons existed among the travelling public, easy to trace as European passengers of distinction generally are in Sydney.

I cursed my negligence in not procuring their address from the officers of the *Somersetshire*, who no doubt had heard of the Squire's destination, and were certain to be entertained by him after landing.

As a last resource I thought of the Clubs. Of course—how dull I was not to have known that the Squire must have introductions, which would secure his being at once made an honorary member of the Australian or the Junction.

Driving up to the senior establishment I dashed into the hall, and with an air of anxiety which evidently puzzled the waiter inquired if Mr. Allerton was a member, and, if so, at present in the house.

That seraph in livery replied deliberately, but in accents to me resembling the music of the spheres.

'Hon'rary member, sir. Mr. Allerton have just gone into the billiard-room, sir. What name shall I say? Please to walk into the strangers' room, sir.'

I almost tottered as I entered an apartment which conveyed no idea of the proverbial luxuriousness of club upholstery. Seizing a pen, I scribbled 'Hereward Pole' upon a sheet of note-paper and handed it to the angelic messenger.

I stood before the fireplace bracing my nerves, like one who awaits the dread summons

of fate, striving in vain to appear cool and collected. I roused myself after a few seconds with the consciousness that I had done no wrong; nay, had indeed achieved the task which in the pride of my youth I had so lightly set myself to accomplish.

In another moment the quick active step sounded in my ears, which I remembered so well in the corridors of Allerton Court. The door opened, and the Squire stood before me.

He gazed for one moment at me with strange, unrecognising air; then his frank features lighting up with their old kindly expression, he exclaimed—

'Good God! Hereward, my boy, is it you at last? And to think that I should not have known you. By Jove, though, what a man you have grown!'

He was holding out his hand, which I shook warmly. What memories did that touch evoke! I tried to speak, but no word would come. The tears rolled down my cheeks as if indeed I had been the sensitive boy he remembered at the old Kentish village, against whom he never dreamed of guarding as a suitor for his daughter's love.

Mr. Allerton looked steadfastly at me with an eye still bright and piercing in its regard. Then his face softened still more, and he turned away his head visibly affected.

'My dear boy,' he said at length, 'there need be but few words between us. That I have doubted, I frankly confess. Appearances were against you. I see before me, in spite of all that has come and gone, the same true-hearted fellow that left old England, and that I was proud to call my son. But come along outside. My heart is too full for talk in a house. Let us have a stroll in this lovely sea-park of yours.'

In a few moments we were passing along the avenue which leads towards the Bay, bordered on the hither side by shining tropical-foliaged trees, comparatively old, through the stately pleasance which a former governor reserved for the citizens of the nation yet unborn. Safe from interruption, and shut out from all sounds but the low whispering of the great fern fronds and thick-massed foliage, stirred by the faint ocean breeze, I poured out my heart as to a father, soon convincing the placable and trusting Squire of the false-

hood of all aspersions upon my loyalty and truth.

I roughly sketched the circumstances of my mining career, describing my companions and detailing the history from first to last of my friendship with Jane Mangold, fated to so tragic an ending.

'Poor girl, and poor boy too,' said the kind-hearted Squire, 'you have had a hard time of it; your gold has not been cheaply purchased. I am glad that scoundrel will be hanged, at any rate. I am not sure but that you would have done as well to have stuck by old England in the long-run. And we, that is poor Ruth and ourselves, should have been spared more misery than I can tell.'

'Many a time and oft I have repented, Squire, that I ever left the Leys; but youth is rash. The hazards that lead to fortune will never lack volunteers from Britain.'

'Well, I suppose we mustn't grumble. It has made a man of you,' he said, looking admiringly at my broad shoulders and stalwart frame. 'I hardly thought you would spread out into such a heavy-weight champion. It must be a fine climate. Hard work seems to

have agreed with you at all events. I wonder if Ruth will know you?'

'She did not recognise me at Charlotte Bay yesterday,' I said, 'but it was late.'

'Yesterday—was that you? Good heavens!' cried out the Squire, deeply moved, 'what an astonishing, almost incredible, coincidence! I shall believe in dreams all my life after. Did you hear what she said about the house she saw in her dream before she left England?'

'I did catch something of the sort,' I answered, 'but her dear face so enthralled me when she raised her veil that the full sense of her speech was lost upon me.'

'Most strange — passing strange,' mused the Squire. 'There is nothing wonderful in her not knowing you yesterday. I had not the remotest idea of you other than as a perfect stranger, though courteous and considerate as we all agreed.'

I smiled.

'When did the dream occur?'

'Before we quitted England. We were debating the question of leaving for Australia, a most unlikely thing to have happened, you must confess, when our poor girl, then hardly

recovered from a terrible attack of brain fever, informed her mother and myself that she had had a dream of astonishingly clear and circumstantial nature; that she had seen a stately stone mansion, unique and remarkable of appearance, standing on the shore of a southern harbour, embosomed in a strangely beautiful garden; *that she had seen you lying on a stone bench under a vast wide-growing shady tree with tropical foliage.*'

'That has been literally true, during every day of the last month,' I answered. 'But how almost incredibly strange that the vision should have been so presented to her.'

'Once I should have classed such a matter,' said the Squire solemnly, 'with frivolous fanciful imaginings and harmless delusions; but of late I have learned that there are more things 'twixt heaven and earth than were dreamt of in my philosophy. I am in that respect, perhaps in others also, a changed man.'

'And what fixed your determination to cross the sea?' I said. 'I should never have believed it if I had not seen you all in the flesh. The Dryads at Allerton Court must have wailed audibly.'

'It was a wrench, God knows,' said the Squire, 'but one will do much for life—and our life is bound up in the welfare of our beloved child. She, poor dear, clung to her dream-revelation as though it had been gospel. And as the idea had given her fresh hope, and the doctor counselled change of scene, we made the plunge. And,' continued the Squire, looking kindly in my face, and then at the blue waters of the bay, over which the white-sailed boats were darting before the western breeze, 'I shall never regret the step. Now I declare I have talked till I am hungry and thirsty both. Come home with me and plead your own cause with Ruth. We are in lodgings.'

'That accounts for my not finding you. I made so sure you would be at one of the hotels, and was half inclined to go back to the *Somersetshire* to find out if I had not been dreaming in my turn that I met you at Charlotte Bay.'

'Why did you not make yourself known then?' commenced the Squire; but looking at my face he read the answer, and went on. 'A natural feeling on your part, my boy, quite of a piece with your old self. I see the digging

and all that has not changed Hereward Pole much. In poor Ruth's delicate state — for though she is quite a new creature now, she had to be carried on board ship — the shock might have had ill effects. Still I think you will find her more or less prepared — thanks to this wonderful dream.'

'And what was your fancy for lodgings? I almost thought you would go to Batty's, where I am staying. Nothing could be more delightful or more luxuriously commodious.'

'Well, the fact was that one of our fellow-passengers, who hailed from Sydney, recommended our present abode so strongly, the lady being the retired widow of a military officer he knew, and a most estimable person, that we took his advice. So our address is 580 Macquarie Street, where my wife is spoiled and Ruth petted as if Mrs. Pemberton was her great-aunt.'

'I have heard of Mrs. Pemberton,' I said. 'You could not be in better quarters, and as dearest Ruth's health I could see had grievously suffered——'

'You say truly, my dear boy; nay more, she has been raised up almost from the grave,

but by God's great mercy she has improved in health and strength almost from the very hour we began the voyage; so perhaps from this lovely land, where all things are new and interesting to her, she will return fully renovated. It only needed, in my opinion, that she should have her faith in you justified. Come and tell her so.'

It was not deemed advisable even now to risk a sudden interview. The Squire confided the important news of my arrival and rehabilitation to his wife, who with prudent limitations imparted it to her daughter. Finally my long-lost, long-loved faithful one was told that I was come, was actually in the house—that I awaited her in the next room.

The door opened, she came forward. One glance was sufficient. No need of careful searching inquiry of feature for love's swift vision.

'Oh, Hereward! oh, my love! and do we then meet again? God is indeed merciful,' were her faltering yet eager words as she sank fainting in my arms. I supported her to a couch, and there, with her head leaning on my shoulder, we sat steeped in bliss so rarely

granted to lovers in this changeful world. Sorrow and trial had disappeared; our passion, which had been tried and tested as by fire, was still fervent as ever after the lapse of years. I had wrested from fortune her favours and smiles. Our hopes were about to be crowned with triumphant, if long-delayed, fruition.

The happy moments lengthened to hours, which fled unheeded, and still we sat hand clasped in hand as she listened with deepest interest to the tale of chequered existence, until, fearful of her failing strength, I commenced to use my new-born authority by vowing that the Dinarzade business must be over for that day.

'I could listen for ever, love,' she said. 'What romance could be half so interesting as Hereward's real adventures to his poor Ruth? Poor Ruth! Poor Lucy Ashton! How often have I thought of you as my absent Edgar Ravenswood! Never has *my* heart wavered; but, unlike her, I had the best, the most tender of parents; but for them I should have died. I am not strong now; but oh, if you had seen the shadow I was a year since!'

'But you will be strong again, my darling,'

I said. 'In this fair new land the soft airs and bright hues will work a magic charm, which my love will deepen,' I whispered.

'Darling,' she said, clasping my bronzed face with both her delicate lily hands, 'I know that I shall be restored to my old self. I feel assured of it by some inward feeling. The cloud is for ever lifted from my life. From the morning after I dreamed about that house—it will ever be The House Beautiful to me, I shall love it till I die—I have felt myself a new creature. And now it has come true. My love was there, even while I gazed upon it, and now we are here together—the love of long ago is illumined. I am too happy to die. Death has no power over those whom joy transforms.'

We were aroused at length by Mrs. Allerton, who came to suggest that dinner could not be more than ten minutes distant; that the Squire, on learning the hour at which we returned from the domain, had refused on principle to partake of lunch; that, as he was walking up and down on the balcony, frequently consulting his watch, punctuality on this occasion might be judicious.

'Poor, dear old Pappy!' said Ruth. 'It is a long time since he gave me a lecture on

punctuality at meals, as he occasionally did at home, for reading up to the last minute, and coming down after the guests had assembled.'

'It is a good sign,' said the kind old lady, with a sigh and a tender look at her daughter. 'I hope you will follow papa's example at dinner, though I must say you have been a very good girl of late. Your country, Hereward, will have the credit of curing her. I had no idea that you were so civilised, I must say.'

'Many English people, my dear Mrs. Allerton, think that we Australians are just emerging from barbarism. I hope to show you some things and places which will bear describing when you return.'

'Oh, I promise you we are not going back till we have seen all that is to be seen,' said Ruth. 'I find that I am passionately fond of travelling now that I have fairly commenced; and I love this country for your sake and all the people in it, except the bushrangers, and they might have been worse when one comes to think, poor fellows. I intend to go to the mines to begin with.'

'You may go anywhere you like, my darling,' said the Squire, who now entered the room,

'as long as you eat your three meals a day with a becoming appetite. There goes the dinner-bell at last. How any one can be as hungry as I am this moment, with the thermometer at 85° in the shade, is more than I can make out. I should never have believed it in England. I wonder if they have got any of those delicious garfish for us which we had at breakfast?'

. . . . . .

I had realised the ancestral paradise. A child of Adam, vicariously driven forth from those wondrous shades, those emerald lawns wet with heaven's first dews, the woods and waters of a world fresh from its Maker's hand. I had been suffered to re-enter. The angel-guarded portals, rendered invisible to mortals since that day of expulsion, as goes the mediæval legend, swung wide for me. To me, alone blest among mortals, was it vouchsafed that I should wander amid groves hallowed by the presence of a pure and perfect love, gazing in the eyes of an Eve pure from every stain of mortal sin, as her guileless untempted prototype.

Day after day Ruth and I strolled together adown the endlessly varied woodland paths with

but the whispering surge-voices for all friendly auditory. We watched the moon rise over the silver lakelets of the harbour, or threaded the mazes of the great garden-park, as the sun drooped low amid the empurpled splendour of the wave. At such moments life seemed distilled into a draught of supernal happiness at which we trembled.

The days, while we gazed, glided. The summer waned, and the long-drawn lingering light insensibly yielded a longer interval to the soft appeals of night. My darling's strength returned apace, her step regained its elasticity, her voice the fuller rounded tone which, though subdued in ordinary moods, I remembered so well.

Meanwhile the Squire and Mrs. Allerton were not wholly unamused. The former made numerous acquaintances at the Australian Club, and even took short excursions into the country, where he looked with deepest interest upon the high-bred herds and flocks and studs of noble horses which had flourished under scientific culture so far, strange to say, from old England.

'Most astonishing, truly wonderful country, this Australia of yours, my boy,' he would say

to me on his return from these excursions. 'Never could have believed that such stock could have been produced out of England—and on grass, nothing but grass, too, that's what beats me; no roots, no hay, no cake! How they do it I can't tell. It's the climate, I suppose, and their being able to run out all the year round. If we had such soil and climate in England our farmers would get too rich.'

'But the labour, you forget that, Squire,' said I mischievously. 'You don't pay your ploughmen and hinds a pound a week, with board and lodging, and fuel thrown in.'

'Ah,' said the Squire meditatively, 'there's something in that. The weekly wages bill at Allerton Court would mount up if we paid at such rates. But it's a splendid country, a magnificent country. If I was a young man and hadn't my bread and butter ready cut and spread for me, like some folks, I'd emigrate. It's the only career for a youngster of spirit, I can see that now.'

'So poor Hereward did the right thing after all, daddy?' said Ruth, putting her hand into the Squire's, and nestling her head against his

shoulder. 'And yet I know some people who said he was so foolish to leave England.'

'Of course he did, pussy, and so did we do right in coming here to hunt him up. There's no knowing what might have happened else. And I know one obstinate young lady whose cheeks are beginning to look very much rounder than they did. It must be the fish or the fresh bread and butter, or——'

'Happiness, my dear old father, pure happiness,' said Ruth, blushing and throwing her arms around that most indulgent of men. 'The doctor in England, you know, said if my mind could be at rest, that health would certainly follow. And here,' she continued, taking my hands with both of hers, 'I have found peace and happiness, if such are permitted on earth.'

'To that God, who in His infinite mercy has brought this to pass, and to whom our prayers have ever been raised, even in our deepest anguish, be all the praise,' said the soft loving voice of Mrs. Allerton, who had joined us noiselessly.

And from every heart, as from every voice, in tones of deepest gratitude and sincerity, rose to heaven the prayer of thanksgiving.

It was arranged that the whole party should remain in Sydney until the approach of the mild Australian winter, when by quitting these southern shores for England we should reach home either in the merry month of May, or when leafy June had summoned the full glory of a northern summer.

To employ a portion of that interval, and at the ardent entreaty of Ruth, I finally consented to guide the whole party to the Oxley diggings, where their full comprehension of one section of Australian enterprise would certainly be effected.

For several reasons, it may well be imagined, I had no great liking for the arrangement. I had quitted the scene of my labours ostensibly for ever. Customary, even exceptionally farewell rites had been performed. There would be a species of awkwardness in reappearing upon the scene after my social demise.

I was to play also the new character of a gentleman at large in the company of distinguished visitors from Europe, one of whom would be speedily known to be my affianced bride.

Such difficulties and awkwardnesses as there

were in the way, I had full confidence that I should surmount. But there *were* difficulties, even probable embarrassments, which the unrelieved *dolce far niente* of my recent life disinclined me to encounter.

I made more than one attempt to dissuade my wilful princess from the enterprise. I exaggerated the discomforts. I used the customary English arguments: 'it was a rough place, and not, perhaps, exactly fitted for people of her delicate nature,' etc.

But she turned the tables upon me by saying—

'Oh, now you are untrue to your good comrades and friends. I am ashamed of you. Besides, you told me that there were quantities of such *very* nice people there. I want to see the Commissioner, and Mr. Merlin, and Mr. Bright, besides that delightful Major, and my old acquaintances Jack and Joe Bulder. I remember Joe quite well, frightening the rooks at sixpence a week for Farmer Giles. In a word, I want to see the *romance* of the goldfields before I leave Australia, and see it I will.'

Here my future proprietress stamped her

foot, and looked so deliciously incongruously fierce that we all laughed.

'Who would have thought that this was the little pale girl that was carried on board ship?' said the Squire, patting her cheek with intense pride and satisfaction. 'My darling, you must not take us to the South Pole, because it is as cold as the North one, though you might not think so; but we will go with you to the end of the world if you will only keep strong enough to order us about. Hereward, my boy, you'll have to take out three more Miners' Rights, I see.'

This joke, in which the Squire with pardonable exultation displayed his knowledge of Australian institutions, brought down the house, so to speak, and for the first time, half-seriously, realising the fact that feminine steadfastness of character may demonstrate itself in more directions than one, I surrendered unconditionally, and prepared mentally for a newly-flavoured experience of goldfields life.

CHAPTER XXXIX

Mrs. Allerton, like most elderly ladies who have led carefully-regulated existences in the ancestral mansions of an English county, was not blessed with much curiosity. She held that the inconveniences of travel more than counterbalanced its advantages, and, somewhat to our joint relief, made up her mind to stay where she was. In the lady of the house she found a most pleasant well-informed companion, ready to afford her every kind of information about Australia without going off the balcony. She feared naturally the altogether untried hazards of a coach journey, and distrusted a goldfield as something between a mining camp and a barricade. Thus she pleased herself and contented every one by giving us three full permission to conduct the journey on our own responsibility, and remaining in Macquarie Street till our return.

'Now that dearest Ruth is so strong,' she said to me, 'and her father and you are in charge, I think every change must benefit her. As for me, I feel quite at home with Mrs. Pemberton. I never thought hot weather would agree with me so.'

'So, partly by rail, partly by coach, we made the eventful journey, and much to my relief the latter part of the adventure was free from any of the *contretemps* which occasionally happen to the best regulated stage companies. The coaches were not unpleasantly crowded, nor were there any inebriated personages involuntarily obnoxious and impossible to quell except by the strong measure of leaving them behind.

We had scarcely reached the grand Alpine chain of mountains which divides the coast lands from the interior plateaux, ere the greater freshness and dryness of the atmosphere was sensibly felt by my companions. Ruth's spirits seemed to rise with every change of scene, and the appearance of the country, the open park-like forest, the flocks which fed by the roadside, with such strange Arcadians in charge, the occasional droves of cattle with their attendant

stock-riders, the pack-horses, the swagman, pipe in mouth, stepping cheerily along the highway, all these characteristic scenes and sounds of a far land, were to her and to the Squire sources of unfailing surprise and interest.

'How different all these people look from our labouring hinds and villagers generally,' said Ruth. 'Nobody looks poor, nobody looks depressed or dependent. You have no poor in Australia, have you, Hereward?'

'We have plenty of people who haven't any money,' I say, 'but one could hardly speak of them correctly as "the poor" in the collectively contemptuous way we used to do in England.'

'That's because it's always warm here.' ('Is it though?' interjected I.) 'People can't be really poor unless they have no fuel and very few clothes as well as hardly any food. Now look at that man making such a nice fire with dry wood in abundance. What is he doing that for? he can't want to warm himself.'

'He is going to boil a quart-potful of water to make himself some tea. He has probably some bread and meat in his pouch. Off these, with the tea, he will make a sufficient meal,

after which he will walk ten, twelve, or fifteen miles as the case may be.'

'Why don't they drink beer?' said the Squire. 'Our washerwomen and ladies'-maids are the only people who drink tea in that way in England.'

'Beer is neither so cheap, so portable, nor so wholesome a drink in all weathers and seasons. Bread, meat, and tea carry the Australian labourer from one side of the continent to the other, not but what they drink beer and strong liquors, generally, with all too little unreserve when they can get them.'

'And suppose our friend's store runs out, and his money, what does he do then?' asked the Squire.

'Present himself at the first sheep or cattle station at the time of sunset, where he receives the dole of food and lodging for one night, almost as a matter of right.'

'And can he do this for any length of time?'

'Virtually, the time is unlimited—until he obtains work to his taste. If the employment or wages do not suit him he will walk hundreds of miles before taking service.'

'So that, practically, the proprietors support

a strike against themselves, by giving sustenance to labourers who perhaps have decided not to accept their rate of wages.'

'It amounts to something of the sort. But, at the same time, it brings the labour to their doors, even at the outskirts of civilisation. In the main, any differences of opinion on these points between pastoral proprietors and their employees arrange themselves easily.'

'And have you ever travelled in that way, Hereward?' said my fair questioner, looking with the deepest interest, as the driver was walking his horses up a hill, at the wayfarer sitting down on a log and commencing his repast.

'Dozens of times, between one diggings and another, when we were hard up—there was nothing else for it. You should hear some of the Major's stories.'

'Poor Hereward!' said the girl, looking into my face with the deepest tenderness and commiseration. 'How much you have undergone, and for my sake! We must try and make it up to him, shall we not, papa?'

'You mustn't think that sort of thing the worst part of our life,' I said; 'any man with

moderate health and constitution may laugh at such hardships under a sky as blue as this. Anxiety, settled bad luck, sickness, debt, doubt of your ability to pay just demands, other misfortunes, these are the true evils of a miner's life. And from these,' I said, taking her delicate hand in mine, 'we may now, without boasting, say that Hereward Pole is freed for ever.'

'Quite so,' said the Squire. 'A young fellow just about to be married to a young woman, who has been waiting for him for half-a-dozen years, who has made a fair fortune by his own exertions, and has an old father-in-law who believes in him, has a very fair prospect before him, as things go in this world; so don't let us have any more melancholy talk—do you hear, Ruth, darling? I feel like a schoolboy out for a holiday. I'm going to enjoy myself in every way, and talk all sorts of nonsense till we get back to Sydney. So don't oppress me with moralising. Your mother and I will have time to do all that on the voyage home.'

I had written to the Major, and apprised him of my intended reappearance on the field thus accompanied, and asked him to arrange at the leading hotel for suitable rooms and accommo-

dation. He was also to inform the Commissioner and Mr. Merlin, as well as Mrs. Mangrove, with other tried and trustworthy friends.

I did not wish to arrive at the Oxley entirely without notice. At the same time I knew that I could trust to the consideration of the mining population generally, as well as to that of former associates and acquaintances, that nothing that could wound the most fastidious delicacy would meet the eyes or ears of my companions.

In due time the Oxley, scene of so many toils and troubles, failures and life-wrecks, triumphs and successes, was reached in safety.

Strange, and yet curiously familiar, looked the characteristic features of a great goldfield. The winding streets, the network of shafts, the parti-coloured mullock heaps, the thronging miners, the toilers and camp-followers, earnestly energetic and yet so unlike any other class of labourers, the throbbing, clanking engines which worked in such near proximity to many of the houses, the dull reverberating clash of the quartz-crushing batteries—all things long familiar, even to irksomeness in my own case, were viewed with the deepest astonishment by the Squire and his daughter.

'What a wonderland! what a new world!' said Ruth, 'and what a perfect treasure-house of tone and colour! I quite envy you the picturesque life you must have led here. My sketches will set me up for life when I get home. There never were such opportunities for "genre painting."'

'H—m!' said I. 'The vivid interest you display fades away in time, I can assure you. All the same, there are worse places than a gold-field.'

Old Hennessy, issuing from his well-ordered hostelry, received us with respectful attention, and promptly provided the most comfortable rooms. All traces of the journey effaced, the appearance of an appetising breakfast interested the Squire and myself temporarily more than the unwonted surroundings. He was specially complimentary as to the cutlets and broiled chicken, and beheld with unaffected surprise a magnificent cold round of beef, which occupied a secondary and strategical position.

'You don't live on pork and molasses, eh, Hereward, my boy, in these, ahem—diggings? I shall get quite Australian by-and-by. That corned round would be hard to beat in old

England. Beautifully marbled, and just the right colour too, properly pink and not too much saltpetre. How that piece of beef would astonish an old butcher at the Leys. He never would believe that there was anything but kangaroo to eat in Australia.'

After breakfast appeared the Major, 'showing great form,' as he would have said himself, scrupulously turned out, and looking in every detail of appearance and manner the high-bred personage he undoubtedly was. With him, after a while, we sallied forth for a walk through this golden land, where fresh signs and wonders met Ruth's eager gaze at every step. Everything excited her observant faculty. The thronging miners, the shops, the women and children—these last so sturdy and self-reliant—the great heaps of red and yellow earth, which she made no doubt were largely mingled with gold.

'This is like a town in Hans Andersen's Tales,' she said. 'How I should like to set him down in Main Street—isn't that the name?—and make him describe it in his charming simple fashion. All would be gold-coloured, the bread, the butter, the beef and mutton, the

picks and shovels, the hair of the women and the beards of the men. I do observe the lower garments of your fellow-diggers, Hereward, are decidedly auriferous looking. Talking of that, sir, why don't they come up and greet you; they haven't forgotten your expressive countenance, have they?'

'It is a proof of the courtesy which characterises a mining population, as I have often told you. They know me well enough, but do not consider this to be an appropriate time for renewing acquaintance. They are chiefly in their working clothes for one thing, and acknowledging you and the Squire as distinguished visitors, they have the sense to defer their recognition of a comrade.'

'Very remarkable set of people, I must say,' said the Squire. 'I never saw so many grand-looking well-set-up fellows together out of a regiment of Horse Guards in my life. They don't look much like our home mining or manufacturing population, I must say.'

'No finer fellows does the world hold,' I reply. 'Moreover, the effect of travel has stamped itself plainly upon face and form.

They have most of them enjoyed a liberal education in that sense.'

'I thought there was something distinctive about them,' said Ruth; 'but now I demand to be taken to our claim, Greenstone or Bluestone, which is it? As I shall be a shareholder I ought to go and inspect the mine. Don't you think so, Major Borlase?'

'Most certainly, Miss Allerton. I know they are not prepared, but you will be able to see how gold is actually brought from the depths of the earth.'

'I quite long, I assure you, to see Mrs. Yorke and the Bulder brothers, Jack and Joe,' she continued. 'How different they would have been if they had remained at the Leys! I saw one of their old comrades just before we left England, and he said—"Be you and Squire aiming to fare to Horsetrailier all the way, Miss Ruth?" I said, "Yes, William."—"Only for to think now; moind ye bain't took by them kangaroos, Miss. They do tell I as they be main fierce in some parts." Just fancy the different degrees of development between such a man as William Wicker and his travelled comrades.'

'I have an idea, Ruth,' said the Squire; 'you

must get up an entertainment, give a lecture on Australian goldfields, and so on, when we all get back. Talk of development, it must be in the air, my darling. Some folks are becoming positively alarming. Are your Australian young ladies so full of speculative theory, Major Borlase?'

'We have them of all kinds,' said the Major, 'I believe, just as in England. But I'm hardly an authority. Hereward will tell you.'

'He affects to decry your sex,' I said mischievously. 'You should consider yourself highly honoured, Ruth, by the Major's attentions.'

Ruth glanced quickly at our comrade. The expression of his face was, as usual, utterly impenetrable. But her quick womanly intuition apparently read something in the melancholy eyes and haughty brow which did not lead her to prolong the badinage.

'A man to love once and always,' she said to herself. 'He has been a victim to some cruel woman, and has distrusted us evermore. Poor fellow—why are the best men so often singled out for ruin?'

Then the Major's deep tones were heard.

'I used to think I had reasons to urge for my scepticism. But Miss Allerton bids fair to shake my most cherished unbeliefs. Be content with your own happiness, Pole, and don't add point to the misfortunes of your less enviable fellow-creatures.'

The shaft of Greenstone Dyke and all its surroundings were much as I had left them. The claim, though fallen off from its original splendour, and no longer sending up dirt to the tune of eight and ten ounces to the load, was still sufficiently rich to be regularly worked. The Major himself had not felt called upon to continue his manual labour. He supervised the management only. Jack and Joe Bulder still preferred to work their shift as usual—the latter for want of knowing what else to do with himself if he were suddenly to discontinue the occupation of years, and the former justly apprehensive that evil might result to him, in case he gave that opportunity to the Adversary which idle hands are popularly held to furnish. Wherefore, Ruth enjoyed the opportunity she had so much wished for, of seeing her old acquaintances of the Leys.

John Bulder had finished his shift and arrayed

himself in a quiet, rather well-cut tweed suit and round hat, much like that worn by the Major and myself before our arrival.

When he therefore took off his hat, and bowed with a certain ease and quiet air of politeness to Ruth and the Squire, they looked wonderingly, as if they had never seen him before. Then Ruth walked forward, followed by the Squire; both shook him warmly by the hand.

'I never should have known you, Jack,' said she. 'Why, whatever have you done to yourself? Now I can recognise your face again. Do you remember picking me up once when I fell off my pony and the nurse was so frightened? Oh, how curious it is to see our old friends so changed and, if I may say it, improved.'

'Thank you very much, Miss Allerton,' said Jack, with much composure, but, at the same time, with great respect. 'I've led a roving—rather a wild life since I left the Leys, and I daresay I am a good deal changed. It's a miracle, though, to see you and the Squire here, looking so well, too.'

Joe was even then coming up the shaft, and so arrested the colloquy.

This proceeding Ruth watched with the greatest interest, being much astonished to see how steadily and cleverly our famed whip-horse, Roan Bessie, effected the process. Joe, too, suddenly shooting into upper air and seeing Miss Ruth and 't'owd Squire,' as he would formerly have called them, standing near the mouth of the shaft, was much more astonished, and gasped for breath, looking from one to another, as they both warmly greeted him, as if they had been denizens of another world.

'You see, Joe, I have come all the way from the Leys to look at the claim and the party,' said Ruth. 'You and Jack have been good friends and true mates to Mr. Pole all through. He and I will always be grateful to you for it—depend upon that, Joe.'

Joe was altogether too much overcome to say much. He stammered out something about Mr. Hereward having brought him across the sea, and that he'd promised to stand by him like an Englishman, and that he had done so, he hoped. His service to Miss Ruth and the Squire, and he was glad to see them looking so well.

'You look very well too, Joe,' said the

Squire, putting his hand kindly on the broad Saxon shoulders, 'a good deal browner and not quite so full of flesh as you used to be at the Leys, but in first-rate condition and as hard as nails, I'll be bound. Well, you've worked to some purpose I'm told, that's a comfort. I suppose we shall see you back again some day?'

'Maybe,' said Joe, rather doubtfully, 'when the claim's worked out. But that won't be this year, Squire. There's no use in leaving good gold behind us, and Mr. Hereward here 'll want all we can send him in the old country, I reckon.'

'I suppose that's what you call being "dividing mates," Joe,' said Ruth, with a smile which completely overpowered the honest fellow, who gazed at her as if she had been the tutelary divinity of all miners and such as dive into the bowels of the earth for a living.

As for Mrs. Yorke, she completely won that matron's heart by walking down to her cottage after lunch and spending a couple of hours quietly with her, during which time Mrs. Yorke related to her most of the events which had occurred at the Oxley and Yatala for the last

five years, with annotations of her own, winding up with the accident to poor Cyrus which had made her a widow, and tearfully drawing attention to the infant Cyrus, whose plump features wore much the same grave uncompromising expression which had characterised his late father.

Apparently Ruth found special favour in Mrs. Yorke's sight, for she subsequently informed me that nothing but actual eyesight could have made her believe that such a young lady existed in the whole world, let alone in England, 'which the people as comes from there is mostly stuck-up till they get their experience,' and that if I had waited for her till I was gray it would have been nothing but reasonable.

Mrs. Mangrove also fell a victim at the first assault. We went there together, and John was brought in to see the young lady from England that he had often heard his wife rally me about. That worthy second lieutenant found his custom of leaving all the talking to his superior officer very convenient on this occasion, only he mechanically began to fill his pipe, and being warned by a portentous frown

put it back into his pouch and stared helplessly around.

His wife received Ruth's thanks for the help which she had extended to me in time of need with much good feeling mingled with dignity, and would have it that she had done nothing out of the way, only in the way of business, and such as any other storekeeper would have readily furnished.

'The fact was, Miss,' said she, bending her keen gray eyes upon the soft countenance of her visitor, 'that Harry here (Mr. Pole, I mean), and the Major, and Joe, and Cyrus, they was such a straight-goin' honest crowd, as no one could help backin' them. Storekeepers, you know, Miss, has to keep their eyes open. They know a man when they see him, bless your heart, and can tell a good sort from a loafer or a rowdy, you believe me. Many a time I've seen Harry here come in for his letters, when they were getting nothing, looking as if he hadn't had a good meal for a week. I never could help getting ready something for him. And if he got a letter of yours, Miss (for of course I always knew the home postmark), he'd look as if it was meat, and drink, and gold, and everything to him for a month afterwards.'

Here the tears came into Ruth's eyes, the harrowing picture of my probably emaciated condition proving too much for her.

'Come, Mrs. Mangrove,' I said, 'things were never quite so bad. I must appeal to the Major. You took care that we didn't get so low, I'm sure, and Mrs. Yorke, too. Don't you remember those beef-steaks and the bottle of grog?'

'Well, what of that? You were both fools enough to have laid down and died rather than run up a bill, and nothing coming in and no show going. Bless your heart, Miss, we had to force it on 'em; hadn't we, John? *We* knew their luck would turn, didn't we, John?'

'Truest word you ever spoke,' said John, surreptitiously filling his pipe, and keeping a match in readiness for Ruth's departure.

'And now we've all seen you, Miss,' said Mrs. Mangrove, falling back on a sense of power derived from a long course of important and complicated business transactions, 'I can tell you this, that when you go away there'll be only one opinion on the whole field—that Harry has dropped upon a bit of luck that's worth No. 4 and Greenstone Dyke twice over.'

'Couldn't ha' laid it out neater, not from the Bench,' affirmed John, striking a lucifer match in the enthusiasm of the moment and blowing it out again.

'Do you know I shall be quite spoiled if I stay here much longer,' said Ruth, laughing, and shaking hands warmly with the worthy pair; 'but I shall know how to think of Hereward's good true friends when we are far away. That's the reason I was so anxious to come to the goldfields.'

'They'll all remember you, no fear,' said Mrs. Mangrove; 'won't they, John?'

John all but dislocated my wrist in token of full approval and private personal leave-taking, merely committing himself to a guttural sound which might have been an echo of his helpmate's concluding words.

He winked at me solemnly as the door closed, and an expression of ineffable satisfaction overspread his features, while the subtle aroma which simultaneously pervaded the atmosphere announced that the unnatural separation between man and pipe had terminated.

CHAPTER XL

All the 'county people,' who are just as much a caste sacredly set apart in Australia as in any other place, called upon Mr. and Miss Allerton with prompt cordiality. After a few days invitations to dinner and to visit them at their pleasant homes, for periods more or less extended, poured in upon us. With some of these magnates the Major and I, Olivera and others, whose social status was acknowledged, had always been on intimate terms. And now, the tinge of romance which clung round the fact of my long engagement being known, seemed to intensify the proverbial hospitality of the district.

I managed by the daily use of Hennessy's well-known trotters and double buggy to return the calls; to show Ruth and the Squire by degrees pleasant homesteads and the great

estates which lay outside of the auriferous region. Nothing could exceed the admiration and interest which each fresh experience evoked from both the emigrants. Ruth's quiet high-bred manner, joined to the innocently joyous air which had of late become habitual to her, gained favour with all her Australian friends, while her genuine interest in the marvels of Nature which everywhere surrounded us in this new world, gratified her entertainers as a flattering tribute to the attractions of Australia.

Very much to my satisfaction, her tact—perhaps still more her unselfish kindness of disposition—enabled her to strike the fortunate medium between the indiscriminate heedless praise which colonists distrust and the supercilious disapproval which they disdain. She examined and compared everything of which she had former experience in Britain; in the great majority of instances giving warm unqualified praise to the product or custom of the new land.

Most of all, perhaps, did she please by her praise of the climate.

'I have good cause to do so,' she would say,

'for it gave me new life. From the first moment that I breathed the faint odorous breezes on the Australian coast till now, when I am revelling in this beautiful, dry, pure atmosphere, an indescribable lightness of heart has possessed me. No! Hereward, it was not altogether the sight of you, miraculous as that appeared, it was the balmy nature of the atmosphere. At any rate I shall live and die in that conviction.'

The Squire on this point was hardly less optimistic.

'How much we lose,' he said, 'by not travelling, by not being acquainted with our own empire! Here I see England over again, only under more hopeful conditions. Never saw finer meadow land in my life, finer grain, finer cattle and sheep, while as for the horses, our friend's four-in-hand, beautifully matched, turned out and driven, would take high rank in the Four-in-hand or the Coaching Clubs. Wonderful country, most wonderful! And to think that it used to abide in my mind as a sandy waste, very hot and bare—a kind of second-hand Sahara.'

The days wore on, and as we rode or drove

through the great estates, some inherited through more than one generation from the original founders, more thoroughly gratified was the Squire with his experiences, more deep in his denunciations of people who lived at home at ease, and talked ignorantly of the labours and successes of colonists.

'How little we know at home,' he was wont to say at the day's close, when we were chatting over our claret in some of the well-appointed mansions of the district; 'how little we dream of the empire which is being built up here at the other end of the world, upon the true old English foundations. And the people, too, regular Englishmen to the backbone; that's what delights me; couldn't tell 'em from Kent or Devonshire men, except that they're bigger, better fed, better taught, and consequently more alive to their own interests and what's going on in the world. Look at those teamsters we saw to-day, all native-born Australians, I'm informed, not a man of them under six feet high, broad shouldered, light flanked, as poor old Maxwell used to say, and as upright and well set up as if they'd lodged with a drill sergeant. We have plenty of good fellows among our

farming men, and the breed's not to be beat, but these are finer men, sir, finer men, though I never thought I should live to say so.'

No wonder the Squire became so popular with all the gentry of the neighbourhood. He was enabled abundantly to gratify his desire to become practically acquainted with all the ins and outs of the semi-pastoral, semi-agricultural life which surrounded him. He was taken over and through great farm-steadings, where were hundreds of acres of grain and hay crops, single fields as large as an English farm, where droves of high-bred Shorthorns, Herefords, or Devons dotted the meadows. He saw the woolsheds where fifty thousand high-caste merinoes come annually to be shorn, and grieved much that he could not witness the operation. There were mills and forges, racehorse and training stables, shops and stores, butchers and bakers, all necessary for the needs of the large population of workers, which sometimes a single estate maintained. And in some of these large and complicated establishments there was not a nail wanting, a rail out of place, the smallest evidence of a day's delay or neglect.

'Another old-world delusion knocked on

the head, Hereward, my boy,' he would say. 'Always understood that you colonists, particularly the Australian-born part of them, took life uncommonly easy; naturally disposed to be indolent, and so on. What do I find to be the case? that for energy—not blind unreasoning force, but intelligent scientific persistence—they exceed us, if indeed they do not beat us hollow. The old country will last my time, Hereward, and there may be something for your children, please God; but old England's going down, my boy, and these new Englands across the Atlantic and Pacific are going up.'

The Squire might not have been so patient and persevering in his research into the very roots of Australian institutions had it not been that the climate so entirely suited Ruth's constitution, that her rapid restoration to perfect health was almost daily visible to both of us. The drier air of the interior, perhaps the most pure, light, and invigorating in the known world, joined to the subtle penetrating aroma of the vast forests of eucalyptus, completed the cure which the voyage had commenced. Her light form regained its exquisite proportions, her eyes the rare brilliancy which a pathetic

incident or a touch of true humour in the old days ever evoked. Even at times a *riante* and sportive tendency, which I had never before noticed, told truly of the marvellous change wrought by the soft airs and bright skies of the charmed south.

'We must get back to Sydney, young people,' said the Squire, with a half sigh one morning as we sat in the breakfast-room of one of our kindest hosts, looking adown the course of the winding river, the red bluffs of which marked its course in contrast with the great meadows which, dotted with sheep and cattle in their various enclosures, stretched away to the spur of a volcanic range of hills. 'If we had that land in Kent what hops we could turn out—eh, Ruth?'

'It is wicked to covet, Pappy. I am afraid you are growing avaricious.'

'Perhaps so, but *apropos* to our return I really have noticed a shade of mild inquiry in your dear mother's letters of late. I have been obliged to put it all on the score of your surprising improvement in health. And truly, darling, the bush air or the hospitality of our kind friends, or the gum leaves, or the diggings,

have made a new girl of you. They won't know you when we get back to Allerton Court; positively they won't.'

'And I feel quite grieved to go away,' said Ruth. 'Indeed, if Hereward here had not disappointed me by getting so alarmingly rich, just as I came out, I should have enjoyed keeping house for him at Greenstone Dyke; I should indeed. Mrs. Yorke would have taught me how to bake bread in a camp oven, and I should have been perfectly happy.'

'H—m!' say I. 'It's very good of you, my dear Ruth, but things are just as well as they are.'

'Very much better,' said our hostess, smiling—a wise approving smile. 'Miss Allerton is a true woman, and we all pine for self-sacrifice secretly now and then, but *les agréments* are not to be despised in the long-run.'

When we returned to the Oxley, where we proposed to stay only two or three days, *en route* for Sydney, we found all our friends ready to receive us. To them was added Mr. Bright, who had been absent on leave. This gentleman had long been an object of deep interest to Ruth on account of his association

with me in the terrible affair of the escort robbery—a fellow-combatant as well as a fellow-sufferer.

The gallant banker was not at all averse to the *rôle* of first soldier, and presently gave Ruth, at her request, all the details of that memorable engagement, describing circumstantially the death of the sergeant in command, and the almost fatal nature of my wound, with attendant incidents.

Ruth's newly acquired roses paled during the recital, to which she listened with subdued earnestness, arising with the conviction that Mr. Bright was a modern Bayard, and that my life was mainly due to his valour and promptitude.

'What has become of Bagstock?' I said. 'The Squire promised to take home some curios for his friends.'

'He has gone out to Back Creek on official business, I believe,' said the Commissioner. 'Started before daylight.'

'Energetic young man,' said the Squire; 'nothing like attention to business — most praiseworthy.'

Here the members of the assembled group exchanged smiles.

'It's something about a coroner's inquest, or an intestate,' said Blake gravely. 'You were sleeping in the next room at the camp, Olivera, what did you hear?'

'I was awakened,' said that gentleman, with his usual grave deliberation, 'by Bagstock's clerk, who came to the window about three o'clock. I just caught the words, "Glorious news, Mr. Bagstock, butcher at Back Creek got drowned going home drunk last night. No will, they say—lots of money in the bank," but probably there was no connection between the expressions.'

'Probably not,' said Blake, observing that Ruth looked deeply pained. 'Careless young fellow that clerk. What did Bagstock do?'

'He said, "Shocking occurrence, you mean, Bunce; order my horse to be saddled, and ask the sergeant to send a trooper to take charge of the effects." I presume he started soon afterwards. I went to sleep.'

'The butcher has three or four thousand pounds to his credit in our bank,' said Bright. 'Bagstock will get ten per cent as Curator of Intestate Estates.'

'You don't say so,' said Olivera languidly.

'As good as three or four hundred pounds legacy to our friend then. That accounts for, but does not excuse, Bunce's reprehensible levity.'

'The butcher was bound to go soon anyhow,' said the Major. 'It is rather a windfall for Bagstock. If two or three more of the same sort occur, Mr. Allerton, he will be able to visit his friends in England soon.'

In despite of our pleasant round of country-house visits, when we returned to the Oxley, Ruth averred that she felt as if she were coming back to the society of old friends.

'I must have an undeveloped tinge of Bohemianism in my nature, Hereward,' she said, 'or I never could feel such an interest in a community like this; perhaps it is a natural feeling of gratitude because of their staunch kindness to you. There seems to me such endless variety of character to classify, that if I lived in this neighbourhood I should never become *ennuyée*. Our dear old home is sacred and delightful, but I must own that there is a dead level in manners, customs, and conduct in an English village which rarely rises above the monotonous.'

'You would make the same complaint here after a protracted experience of the life.'

'Impossible,' she answered. 'Now look at that man walking towards us. A most picturesque figure, is he not? you would not meet any one like him at the Leys in a century.'

'He is an old acquaintance of mine,' I said. 'How goes it, Marco?'

The miner, a stalwart Genoese, with a grand black beard and a tranquil, pleasant countenance, carefully put down his pick and shovel, and lifted his hat, bowing low with the courtesy which seems natural to all foreigners. He then shook hands with me.

'On the whole, well; but our last shaft has just proved a failure. We are now going to sink on a new level.'

'How long were you at it?' queried I.

'Nearly four months; six in the party.'

'And got nothing?'

'Not so much as would pay the blacksmith.'

'Oh, what a pity,' said Ruth sympathetically, probably picturing Marco with a wife and family dependent upon him for support. 'It grieves me that such things can happen in a rich place like this.'

'It is the fortune of war, madame,' said the miner, with an air of philosophical resignation. 'We must hope the luck will change. Meanwhile, permit me to say adieu, and thank you for your kindness.'

He bowed again to Ruth, shook hands with me, took up his tools, and strode onward.

'Now, there is a tragedy in real life,' she said, as he passed out of hearing. 'I suppose such things daily occur here. What a grand-looking man, so clean and neatly dressed too! How nobly he bears his misfortune! Could we help him in any way, Hereward? Perhaps he has children and a wife in distress.'

'Marco Dorazzi is a bachelor, and is known to have several thousand pounds in the bank,' I answered, smiling at Ruth's impulsive charity. 'A lost shaft, more or less, will not be the ruin of him.'

Bent upon making the best use of the short time now left to us, Ruth persuaded me to accompany her to the homes of many of the married miners, being most anxious to find out for herself, she said, how the domestic business was managed. She so completely avoided all

appearance of condescension—sitting down and presently making herself at home with the children where there were any—that the hard-working matrons felt impelled to open their hearts to her on the spot. For the most part, cleanly well-dressed children met her view, the elder ones, perhaps, just returning from school, the younger ones, in all respects, well provided for. Often a neat vegetable garden with a few flowers and rose-bushes gave an air of comfort and slight embellishment to their humble abodes.

'After all,' Ruth would say to me, as we strolled homeward, not seldom meeting the man of the house returning from his 'shift' with the evidences of toil plainly visible, 'these people live a much more enjoyable and natural life than our English peasantry. Their cottages, if not very substantial, are clean and suited to the country, such a summer land as it is. You don't see those curiously-patched garments so common in England. The terrible grinding poverty, with the workhouse in the distance, that overshadows our poor is absent here. I could have been very happy here myself, living in a hut just like that woman we just quitted.

I am sure her rose-bushes were beautiful, and nothing will make me think otherwise.'

'But the comforts of a home,' I remonstrated.

'What are the comforts of a home,' she replied, almost impatiently for her, 'to a woman whose heart is eaten away daily and hourly with torturing doubts or bitter griefs? She has a soft bed on which she cannot rest, delicate food which no longer nourishes her, the external shell of a life which is slowly perishing.'

'But you could not have lived here,' I persist. 'How could I have asked or permitted you to come?'

'Why not?' she again asked, with the same earnestness of tone; 'because all the true woman is pared away, do you suppose, by the refining process of high civilisation till no longer faith, nor steadfast endeavour, nor patient endurance, are possible to her for true love's sake, unless under a lofty roof and amid crowds of servants? That would be to make a puppet and a butterfly of her who has the misfortune to be born among the higher ranks —not a loving woman,' she added with ineffable

tenderness. 'No, Hereward,' she continued, 'it is all well ended, I humbly trust. A merciful God be thanked for my present happiness; but I vow to you that I would a hundred times rather have lived in one of these huts, and cooked and washed for you as that humble woman there does for the man we just saw returning, than have waited the weary solitary years which have passed.'

'Why didn't you take somebody else?' I said. 'A man's heart more or less does not matter much in modern society. I have thought a thousand times that I had no right to keep you in pining uncertainty about my fate.'

'That is possible to some people,' she said softly, 'and I do not think I should altogether blame a girl who did so. But not possible to me—not to me, darling. I feel now as I have never felt since the first year you went away. I suppose you cannot well be poor any more; but whatever happens we must never, *never* be separated again in this world. You will have to make the best of it.'

Probably the best man living is wholly unable to gauge the depth and tenderness,

the ethereal pervading essence of her very nature which expresses itself in woman's devotion. As I heard the soft chords of that beloved voice vibrating with unshed tears, eloquent with half-uttered tones, I was fully conscious that, deeply as I appreciated her love and truth, I had but too often resigned myself to an apathetic despair, while she, the solitary watcher in her far-off home, was hourly a prey to corroding fears, palpitating on the rack of mute unutterable woe.

How unworthy was I of her heart's best blood, of her purest affections, offered up on the altar of virgin love, for my sake, for my sake only!

I could only tremble and wonder at the priceless sacrifice—could only vow inwardly, with a fervour which the uttered promise often lacks, to partly repay by the lavish dedication of my future life the soul's treasure which was to be entrusted to my guardianship.

. . . . . .

On our return Mr. Bright and Mr. Bagstock greeted us with much cordiality, the latter apologising for his unavoidable absence, but laying all the blame upon the inconsiderate

action of the butcher, who might (he alleged) just as well have waited another week.

Ruth looked grave at this, and apparently to turn the conversation walked forward to an aboriginal woman, who, with a small bright-eyed picaninny at her back and another by her side, was soliciting 'tick pence' in a dolorous whine.

'What a thin dress, poor thing,' said her compassionate sister on the side of Eve, 'and a torn blanket, too!'

'That's all Bagstock's fault,' said Mr. Bright jocosely. 'He has a bale of them at the police-office, sent up by the Government to be given to these dark predecessors of ours. You ask him, Maria.'

'You gibbet blanket old Maria, Massa Bagtock?' whined the gin, 'all about blanket I believe you got long a Guv'ment.'

'That one stealem blackfellow blanket, I believe, Maria,' chuckled Mr. Bright mischievously, 'big one sell 'em along a storekeeper, mine thinkit.'

To Maria, under the influence of more than one glass of grog, unfortunately, this appeared a very feasible suggestion. On the

strength of it she immediately raised her voice and began to threaten Mr. Bagstock with condign punishment.

'Me yabba Massa Commishner,' she said, 'put you long a Logs, I b'leeve taken from blackfeller—me know, now, me tellum sargint —me tellum. Me seeum blankit along a courthouse.'

We all exploded with laughter. Bagstock looked annoyed, and Ruth rather terrified, as Maria began to perform a kind of war-dance round the badgered C.P.S.

'Hold y-y-y-your tongue, you s-s-sable storyteller. Bright, you ought to b-b-b-be ashamed of yourself. Of course I have the blankets. They are to be given out to the whole tribe on the Q-Q-Queen's b-b-birthday.'

'What a thoughtful act!' said Ruth. 'Do they give all the poor creatures blankets once a year; and how many are in the tribe?'

'Once a y-y-year,' said Bagstock,' and about a h-h-h-hundred in this tribe.'

'How I should like to see them gathering,' said Ruth. 'I have hardly ever seen any of the Indians of the land. I think all savages most interesting.'

'Then we'll m-m-make it the Queen's b-b-birthday the day after to-morrow, Miss Allerton,' said Bagstock, with decisive gallantry. 'Tell 'em it's because the winter's s-s-setting in early.'

'Oh, Mr. Bagstock, thank you,' said Ruth, 'how kind of you ; but can you do it?'

'Not the slightest d-d-difficulty,' said he, 'almanacs scarce on the g-g-goldfields.'

'Bravo, Bagstock,' said Mr. Bright, 'and I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll give a picnic to the school children and let Miss Allerton see what Australian youngsters are like.'

CHAPTER XLI

It did not matter much, presumably, at the antipodes about the ante-dating of Her Gracious Majesty's birthday by a month or two. So Bagstock sent round a herald announcing that in consequence of a cold winter being expected, the Queen's birthday would take place on the following Thursday, when blankets would be distributed punctually at ten o'clock A.M.

It was wonderful how fast this piece of intelligence circulated among the scattered aboriginals of the district. Whether the fiery cross was borne around in the shape of a rum bottle, or the picture-writing of the Aztecs resorted to, cannot be known. It was curious to observe, however, on the day preceding the supposed royal birthday, how many of Her Majesty's sable subjects were seen making, by the shortest

routes known, by hill and dale, by wood and wold, towards the Oxley township.

Not that the Australian *indigène*, dark of hue and strongly suspected in these free-thinking evolutionary days of pre-Adamite proclivities, has been found invariably incapable of the humanities. More than one philanthropist has tested the question of pan-genesis, so ordering that the swart son of the waste should receive his due allowance of Eton, Latin grammar, and Euclid, in company with the children of the White Conquest.

Indeed, the tale is told of a newly-arrived European wayfarer, sore troubled about a variety of tracks where 'you can't miss the road,' coming unexpectedly upon a black fellow lying under a shady tree, wrapped in a blanket, and engaged in the perusal of one of Sir Walter Scott's novels.

The white man stared, then said—

'I say, which of these three is the proper road to Mildool station?'

The 'savage' rose, bowed courteously, and thus delivered himself—*Medio tutissimus ibis.*

'What?' shouted the Englishman.

'Don't you understand?' said the congener

of the Scholar Gipsy, pointing to the middle path—

> '"The middle is the safest way,
> Take it, and rest ere close of day."'

The amazed Anglo-Saxon put spurs to his horse, and, arriving at the station barely with the light, gasped out that he had met the Devil under a tree in the forest, who had quoted Latin and talked poetry to him.

'To be sure,' quoted the Scottish host, as he sent the stranger's hack to the stable.

> '"The Deil or else an outler quey
> Gat up and gae a croon."

It was either Old Nick or Bungaree—I did not know he was back.'

'And who the deuce is Bungaree?'

'He was a smart little black boy enough twenty years ago, when the idea occurred to old Moxon to send him with his own sons to the Normal Institution in Sydney, Dr. Lang's pet school. There Bungaree learned to read and write—moreover, Latin and Greek, with all other sophistications of the human animal, bringing home (for he was highly intelligent) more than his share of prizes. His success

gratified all the good people mightily until he approached manhood.'

'And then?'

'Why, then, the wolf cub growled and broke his chain, took to the bush, blankets, and a wild life among his peers, learned to love the fire-water and to hate work and settled abiding places. It was he whom you saw to-day.'

During each forenoon Ruth was uncommonly busy, and visited so many shops that I inquired whether she was going to load a vessel with soft goods souvenirs of the Oxley; but I could not extract any satisfactory explanation, and was therefore fain to leave things to find their own level. I also discovered her deep in colloquy with Mr. Bright and Mr. Bagstock, and made no doubt but that with the assistance of these worthy gentlemen she was concocting some scheme by which the guests at the approaching school feast, or members of the aboriginal tribe, would profit.

Mr. Bright, with his usual munificence, had invited all the school children within a radius of ten miles to partake of his bounty, and had arranged that, in addition to a substantial lunch,

with cakes and oranges and ginger-beer at discretion, suitable presents should be allotted to all the girls over ten years old. This was the department Ruth wished to supplement.

When the fateful day arrived, Ruth could hardly eat her breakfast for excitement, and immediately after that important meal I was dragged into the Police Camp Reserve, where the remnant of the once powerful and numerous tribe of the Oxley (long feared of the pioneer settler) had bestowed themselves.

It was a strange and perhaps a piteous sight. War and disease, the fire-water of the white man, and the curses which ever accompany civilisation, had pretty well cleared out the 'braves' of the tribe. The men who had slain stockriders and speared cattle, killed shepherds, and caused stations to be abandoned a score of years agone, were chiefly absent. They lay on lonely sandhills or beside marshy lagoons, whither they had fled in vain hope of escaping the vengeance of the white man. A few stalwart survivors, sullen of aspect, showed in their bloodshot eyes and sodden countenances that they had found a panacea for all evils in the debasing habits which they had copied from the

whites. Only the graybeards of the tribe exhibited dignity and the true stately savage unconsciousness.

Each sat on the earth awaiting his turn of distribution; and yet betrayed no eagerness to receive the gift to which they attributed so much value. They understood but little English, and disdained all the arts by which a largess is stimulated.

The women and children predominated as to numbers, and these were the objects of Ruth's deepest interest and sympathy. Some of the half-caste children were exceedingly good-looking, and it was all I could do to prevent Ruth burdening herself with a pretty saucy five-year-old, whose mother offered to sell her in so many words for twenty shillings sterling. Though the woes of civilisation had worked much evil upon most of the women of the tribe, some of the younger gins, especially those whose complexions were 'dishonestly fair,' were lithe of form and pleasant to look upon. On these Ruth gazed with the deepest sympathy and unfeigned tenderness of pity.

'Poor things,' she said, 'what a lot theirs must be! How I wish I could help them, could

shape their lives into what charity and thoughtfulness might make of them! I feel quite sad that I shall go away and never see these strange, half-childish, fawn-like faces again. In their natural wistful expression I can fancy I see the half-formed forest creature we read of, not wholly human, yet all graceful and redolent of the old classical myths.

'My dear Ruth,' I remonstrate, 'you really seem to discover so many wonder-treasures in my country that you will never consent to return to your own. You ought to have married Bishop Selwyn, or some other evangeliser of the heathen, instead of plain Hereward Pole.'

'I cannot imagine a more grand and ennobling manner of wearing out one's life,' she said, 'and you are not to laugh at me on such subjects, sir, or I shall think that the fire of trial has left some dross behind. Ask Mr. Bagstock when he is going to begin.'

That worthy and decisive official here advanced and saluted Ruth with flowing courtesy. With him were the Commissioner and Mr. Merlin. These gentlemen had been most assiduous in their attention to Ruth and the Squire since their arrival at the Oxley.

Considerably less than twenty-four hours, indeed, had been suffered to elapse before the higher officials from the camp presented themselves and duly left their cards upon the new arrivals, taking the opportunity of congratulating me cordially upon my return under such favourable auspices. The pleasure derived from the introduction appeared to be mutual. Ruth professed herself perfectly charmed with the Commissioner, whose air and bearing, she alleged, possessed a distinct flavour of chivalry hardly ever seen in these degenerate days. Mr. Merlin's flawless courtesy and carefully veiled satire created a natural astonishment in the Squire's mind that such a perfect and entire chrysolite, socially speaking, could be found in the wilds of Australia; while Mr. Bagstock's truly English appearance prepossessed him at once in favour of that gentleman, more especially when he discovered that his family lived in an adjoining county to Allerton Court.

Ruth had, very properly, though partly at my instigation, not attired herself in what some people consider to be suitable travelling raiment, which means their oldest and plainest garments. She had not set out with the notion that she

was never to meet with any more ladies and gentlemen, or that, such being the case, it did not matter how unbecomingly she was dressed. On the contrary, she wore her last consignment of costumes, not very long from Paris, the freshness and fashion of which caused her to be regarded with a much deeper interest than would otherwise have been the case. Her manner being gracious, and her conversation original and piquant, she fulfilled thus all the conditions of popularity.

The sergeant and a brace of picked troopers attended in charge of the coveted blankets, as well to dispense one by one those useful articles as to moderate any excessive eagerness which might be displayed by the wilder denizens of the forest.

As they approached—the old men coming first in order—each was asked his name, which was formally entered in a book by the clerk, when his woollen donation was delivered and duly debited to him. After the graybeards came the weird and awful beldames of the race. Savage women, after youth and middle age have passed by, are certainly the most unpleasing, not to say revolting specimens of

humanity the traveller is called upon to view. Ruth shuddered as the chattering scolding crones came up, whining and entreating for a double allowance of blanket, always trying to smuggle an additional one for some fabulous grandchild, whose existence they were utterly unable to prove.

Gradually the ranks thinned. The fortunate recipients enveloped themselves in their prizes, or, folding them, sat down in majestic serenity upon them. Then came the boys—shy or bold, shamefaced or impudent—with roving hawk-like glances, rivalling those of the forest-dwellers in piercing acuteness and wandering restlessness of vision. Lastly, the shy timidly-stepping girl children, with great gleaming dark eyes and dazzling white teeth, half-unclosed in wonder and half in terror.

When all, even to the tiniest elf, were supplied, Mr. Bright called one of the troopers to roll over another great package, and, opening it, commanded all the women to stand in a row. Then Ruth took my arm and walked over to it, producing a bright, coloured print dress and a warm garment fitted for winter wear. This she delivered to the oldest 'gin' with her own

fair hands and in most genuine expression of goodwill. The poor old thing looked with perfect amazement at the fair and gentle benefactress for an instant, and then, realising the astounding fact, threw herself on her knees before her and kissed the delicate hand of the giver.

Then were handed out to the delighted foresters similar presents all down the line, until each one of the women and girls was made proud and happy by the same thoughtful gift. The men, indeed, looked jealous and awkward as not deemed worthy to partake of the bounty of this celestial visitant, as they appeared to deem her, but upon Mr. Bright saying a few mysterious words in their own tongue all discontent vanished and a pleasant anticipatory expression pervaded the party.

Finally, Mr. Bagstock called for three cheers for Her Majesty Queen Victoria, upon which a tremendous long-drawn cry, swelling and increasing in volume, rose to the heavens, all eyes being turned to Ruth, as if with a conviction that Her Majesty had personally deigned to honour them with her presence; but upon Mr. Bright making another short speech in the

aboriginal tongue, which he had learned in his early outpost days, a deeper gratitude expressed itself in a gathering round of the whole tribe as if disposed to kiss Ruth's shoe-latchet in reverent worship. Tears of joy and gratitude rolling down the faces of the younger women and girls showed that the darker complexion of these children of nature denoted no essential difference in the emotional qualities of the sex.

A portion of the tribe subsequently adjourned to the ground wherein the sports of the children's picnic were to be arranged, and gazed on the relaxation of the white man with edifying gravity. But, in the interests of truth, it must be related that the greater number of the adults betook themselves later on to the lower sort of public-houses, where they in too many cases sold the Queen's bounty for grog. Mr. Bagstock narrowly escaped holding a coroner's inquest upon one of the younger 'gins,' who had excited the wrath of her sable spouse, and was supposed to be lying at the bottom of a deep pool in the Oxley. Indeed that gentleman, at the first bruit of the affair, picked up a worn copy of Shakespeare in his hurry upon which to swear the jury, and was only prevented from

completing his preparations by the return of the supposed corpse, but little the worse for blows and immersion.

There was ample time, owing to the early hour at which the ceremony had been initiated, for the completion of this preliminary performance before Mr. Bright's *clientèle* arrived.

This they presently commenced to do in great force, the rendezvous being the paddock of a friendly farmer, who granted the privilege of strewing his grounds with countless fragments of paper parcels and other debris of lunch to all such companies and associates as desired to make merry in the vicinity of Oxley.

The spot selected was within a mile of the township. One of those natural forest parks peculiar to Australia, where green turf under the century-old trees and a moderately level surface permitted foot races, dancing on the green, kiss-in-the-ring, and other time-honoured rustic pastimes.

Mr. Bright, whose hospitable tendencies were unlimited, had made it understood that though the children were specially invited their relatives and friends were also expected, and would be equally welcome.

The day was of course fine. It was also moderately cool and breezy, so nothing could be more appropriate. Buggies and carriages were in attendance—a general holiday had been proclaimed by the Commissioner, by whom alone miners could be allowed to be legally absent from their claims. We all drove to the spot.

There stupendous preparations had been made and were still being made under the orders of Mr. Bright, who had preceded us and stood in the midst like a General of Division, ordering autocratically and issuing commands for fresh supplies, as if he was going to banquet the southern district *en masse*.

'I like to see things well done when one is about it,' said the Squire, as band after band of happy school children marched in, carrying banners and insignia, perfectly wild with happiness and youth—synonymous mostly. 'But what a spread it will have to be; there must be a thousand children at least.'

'What a beautiful sight!' said Ruth in a tone of the deepest sincerity. 'I certainly never saw so fine an array of nice-looking intelligent children before. So well dressed and well cared

for, as they all look. Such bright intelligent faces, too. There is also a distinct refinement and high mental development which I don't think I ever observed among village children before.'

'I'll back the youngsters of this district, Miss Allerton,' said Bright effusively, 'against those of any part of Australia. I've been all over it, and I never saw anything to compare with them, I assure you.'

'It's a theory of mine,' said Olivera, who had joined our party, looking as if he had just quitted a London club, 'that the fusion of the different branches of the Aryan family, more than usually feasible in the concourse of a goldfield's population, is favourable to a high standard of mental and bodily excellence.'

'I don't doubt but you're right,' said the Squire. 'A border population is always a vigorous one, chiefly superior to the races of which it is compounded. It is to be hoped that you colonists will educate these youngsters thoroughly. There will be nothing commonplace about them, for good or for evil.'

'Miss Allerton shall examine them by-and-by,' said Bright. 'You should hear them sing,

too. Most Australian children are musical, and all our schools attend to their chorus-singing.'

'I am so pleased we were able to wait for this delightful spectacle,' said Ruth. 'I suspect you did it partly to please me, Mr. Bright. It was very kind of you, I could not have enjoyed anything more.'

'I don't suspect it at all,' I said. 'Bright's quite unable to resist any new lady visitor. It's a good thing you're going back to Sydney, there's no end to the extravagances he is capable of committing.'

'I hope he will never do anything that he will regret more. When we get back I must take this for a pattern for my school feasts at the Leys. But oh! if we could only be sure of such lovely weather.'

'There's where they have the advantage of us,' said the Squire. 'But I hope to see Mr. Bright and our other good friends there some day. Old England has its good points, and we must try if we can't show them something in return for all their kindness. When do you expect to see England again, Captain Blake?'

'Some of these fine days,' said the Commissioner, 'if my old uncle does the right thing by my brother Jack and myself, I hope to be able to keep a dog and enjoy a little hunting before I get too old, if I ever do. You can't get it good out of England.'

'Have to fall back upon coursing Chinamen, eh, Blake?' said Mr. Merlin, who had now joined us, looking refreshingly cool and as innocent as if there was not a criminal within a hundred miles. 'I am certain Miss Allerton would not have countenanced a chase we witnessed one morning, eh, Pole?'

'Purely accidental, I assure you,' said Blake, turning graciously to Ruth, whose face became shaded over at this untoward allusion. 'Fact is, my poor dogs got demoralised by living in the camp with police and other man-hunters. Had to send them into the country, I assure you, to rub off the effects. But here's a movement along the whole line of infantry.'

The luncheon hour being imminent, a decided convergence had taken place towards the tents, of which every available one had been secured by Mr. Bright and his emissaries that the neighbourhood afforded. Besides this,

large booths, walled and roofed with boughs and decorated with great fern fronds and tapering slender pine trees, had been erected.

Within these a generous supply of eatables and cautiously composed concoctions for assuaging thirst had been provided. The simple needs of childhood were amply gratified, while their proud happy parents and friends did justice to the good cheer, and inwardly chaunted the praises of their generous entertainer.

'I think the last spread we had was a dejeuner at Hennessy's to that distinguished novelist, Anthony Towers, wasn't it, Pole?' said Bright; 'only it was attended by children of a larger growth.'

'Yes, I remember,' said the Major. 'Cuisine very fair and Heidsieck's dry monopole to wash it down. The old Turk gratefully acknowledged it in his book on Australia by a faint allusion and a statement that the cookery was better than the speeches.'

'Comes of trying to give honour where honour is due,' said Bright, 'but he did mention the oysters we had that night.'

'Yes, confound him! You will go down to posterity with the Bishop and Mrs. Proudie,

and all that lot, as the munificent banker who provided them.'

'What was it he said to you, Jack,' inquired Mr. Merlin, with suspicious softness of manner, 'when you asked him confidentially if he would have taken you for a native?'

Bright hesitated for an instant, and then answered—

'"Not for an aboriginal certainly." What the deuce did he mean by that?'

We all shouted again. And Ruth 'came nearer,' as an American friend would say, to a hearty laugh than I had seen her for many a day.

The day wore on. Though warm, the atmosphere was so tempered by the sighing breeze, which ever and anon came whispering through the forest trees and over the sun-glinted hill-tops, that the most delicately constituted organisation could not have felt oppressed.

The sports were nearing their close; the little ones had eaten and quaffed and romped and played and raced to their hearts' content. Mr. Bright had made them a speech, praising their proficiency at the various schools, on the Board of Management of which he was a sort

of perpetual chairman, complimenting their parents and guardians upon their robust appearance and polite manners, and winding up by formally inviting them all to a similar picnic to take place, if he were well and at the Oxley, on that day twelve months. If he was prevented from attending, he was sure his friend Mr. Merlin would be happy to take his place, knowing his warm interest in the education question, and his proverbial liking for children.

This address, whatever might have been its rhetorical merit, was sufficiently telling to 'bring down the house,' being specially adapted to the audience, and boasting a peroration more attractive than are many more ambitious efforts.

After this was over, one of the head teachers made a short reply thanking their friend Mr. Bright, whose goodwill and kindness were proverbial from one end of Australia to the other, and calling for cheers for the lady from England whom they were all so glad to see among them and for Mr. Allerton.

Then a little voice which I fancied I knew called for three cheers for Harry Pole, a suggestion which apparently met with general approbation, and with a terrific storm of cheers for Mr.

Bright the great array of happy children formed into their original ranks and companies and moved away to their respective homes.

Just then a trooper came galloping up, and saluted his officer.

'Mr. Merlin, a gentleman wishes to see you.'

'Indeed,' replied Mr. Merlin, in somewhat acidulated tones. 'Lead on at once. *I very seldom see one.*'

With this Parthian shaft, and his lowest, most courteous bow, Mr. Merlin departed, leaving us with a sensation of *sic transit gloria mundi*, and a disposition to move slowly homeward.

For my part, I thought that Ruth had undergone rather much fatigue and excitement for one day, and I was not sorry when our comfortable rooms at Hennessy's received us, and all further exertion was relegated to the indulgent future.

CHAPTER XLII

The next morning's issue of the *Beacon* was filled up in great measure by the reports in detail of the blanket ceremony and of Mr. Bright's picnic, dwelling much upon the munificence therein displayed, and holding up for imitation the generosity of spirit which had always characterised that gentleman. 'We were pleased to observe among the spectators,' the editorial went on to say, 'the distinguished visitors from England who have lately honoured our goldfield with their presence. Miss Allerton and her father—the Squire of Allerton Court, in the county of Kent—accompanied by Mr. Pole, attended on the ground during the whole day, and took the most lively interest in the proceedings. The lady before mentioned, indeed, showed by her generosity on both occasions that her sympathy was truly genuine;

and in the name of the residents of this goldfield generally we beg to thank her most cordially and respectfully for the intelligent interest in social and mining matters she has exhibited during her stay. Such visitors from the old country, even when, as in the present instance, of high social rank, do themselves honour as well as the mining population by temporarily relinquishing the privileges of their order, by mingling and conversing on equal terms with those around them. Such truly aristocratic conduct meets with genuine appreciation on a goldfield, and in no community is it more accurately gauged.

'Turning from such agreeable reflections, we regret deeply to have to allude to a presentment of the darker side of goldfield life, to verify the rumours of a tragedy enacted in our midst on the very day when far different scenes were witnessed at the Oxley.

'Our readers have been made aware from a perusal of our exhaustive mining reports of the daily improving character of the reefing industry at Mason's, and of the unprecedented rates to which certain scrip has lately reached.'

Such was then the nature of the summons by which Mr. Merlin had been reft so suddenly from the festal scene, and from the prospect of a *soigné* last dinner at Hennessy's, to which we had invited him, in company with the Major, Mr. Bagstock, Blake, and Olivera.

I was just in time to secure the copy in the breakfast-room, and to give Hennessy a hint to suppress that and any following issue, as far as our apartments were concerned.

What had happened was only hinted at, no further particulars being then obtainable, but on Merlin's return late at night (he had been officially present at the coroner's inquest) the ghastly details were brought out in the smoking-room.

It would appear that the Great Columbia and Undaunted Quartz Reefing and Pyrites Reduction Company (Limited) had been paying so surprisingly well of late that the management, among whom Mr. Jake Challerson was a leading director, owning, indeed, one-eighth of the whole immensely rich claim, determined to give a lunch in entertainment of the metropolitan shareholders. Special coaches had been put on and the supposititious birthday of the

Sovereign had been a gala day in every sense at Mason's.

Strangers, much wondering, clad in unwonted raiment, escorting prepossessing personages of the gentler sex, thronged the chief and only street of Mason's. Simple questions were asked as to familiar goldfields sights, and pretty expressions of wonder and delight issued from cherry lips. *Facile princeps* among the perhaps unconventional magnates of the directory, the illustrious Jake Challerson, unapproachably attired, redolent of fabulous wealth, was regarded with fluttering interest by the ladies, with ill-concealed awe by the younger members of the party.

Flags were flying along the narrow thoroughfare, which, macadamised with glittering white quartz, and bordered by acres of plate-glass windows, looked like a street scene in an opera. Those miners whose labour was not actually necessary in the working had leave given, or had given themselves leave, as the case might be, to make holiday. The guests were hilarious and jubilant when not awe-stricken at the statistics blandly poured forth from the well-practised lips of their hosts. The entertainers were

flowingly gracious and generous, as only gatherers of gold *au naturel* ever are. Many a quaint fragment, or matrix-encircled nugget, the weight of which astonished the fair recipient, was transferred 'without registration' during a visit to the strong-room on that auspicious day.

Mr. Challerson, tall, languid, romantic-looking, posed as the Comte de Monte Christo, and gave on all sides with the thoughtful yet unqualified profusion of that illustrious *revenant*.

The guests enjoyed a full survey and fuller explanation of the great steam-driven quartz-crushing machine, with its celebrated battery, where scores of steel-shod stampers fell ceaselessly with regular irregularity upon heaps of pale stone throughout the long long summer day, the star-stream silent night. They shuddered as the ground, the whole strong edifice, seemed to quiver with earthquake tremor beneath the tremendous thuds of the tireless Briareus. They saw, when the streaming water carried off in solution the sand to which the matrix had been reduced, the thin lines of gold which the water was powerless to move, awaiting the hour of cleaning-up. They saw

the very spot where the Chinaman fell last year, shot in the act of robbing the sluice boxes by night. Having undergone as much wonder, excitement, instruction, and intimidation as could be borne without refreshment, it was no wonder that the summons to lunch was hailed with deepest approval.

Lunch was served in one of the engine-sheds, which was brilliantly draped for the occasion, and ornamented out of its workaday appearance. Champagne flowed; the service was costly; the rarest fruits and flowers, specially forwarded by express, graced the board, which groaned under dainties and delicacies uncatalogued.

Mr. Jake Challerson was the life and soul of the whole party. After the refection was over, the 'cage' was brought into requisition, and the whole party, prepared for fresh adventures, arrived safely at the lower level, and walked along the great main drive, which, lighted up with coloured lamps for the occasion, presented somewhat the appearance of Aladdin's Cave.

The miners stood respectfully at the angles of the cross-cut drives, and listened with pleased astonishment to the soft voices and rippling

laughter which aroused the unaccustomed echoes.

At length the cage began to make periodical upward ascent. By degrees the whole joyous party, assisted in safely bestowing themselves by Mr. Challerson, who chivalrously remained below till the last moment, regained the upper air.

Here Mr. Merlin, from whom the above sketch of proceedings had been elicited by incessant questioning, declined further interrogation. Handing in the depositions which he had brought back with him, he desired us to read for ourselves. I was chosen lector, and amid a silence which showed how deep was the interest, read as follows—

'This deponent, Hans Bunsen, on his oath states: "I am one of the wages-men in the Columbia and Undaunted Company's workings. I remember the day of the picnic and lunch. A large party came to see the workings; they were lowered down the shaft in the cage, both ladies and gentlemen. I saw the deceased, Mr. Jake Challerson, there. I knew him as one of the principal shareholders in the Company. He was at Ballarat when I was there in

1851. He used to be called Yankee Jake. I do not know if he was an American. He had been in America, I believe. He talked like one. I also knew deceased, Old Man Dick, as we called him; he had been working for the last two years for the Company; he was a very silent man. We used to think him a little touched—not quite right in his head. He was a good man to work. I have heard that he was married, and that his wife had run away from him; did not know of my own knowledge, or care, certainly not—what was it to me? Every man's business is his own affair. There was a shot going to be put in just at the bottom of the shaft; we wanted to take down a bench there. The drill had been put in, and Old Man Dick was waiting with the fuse until the party should go up. Jack Martin and I, with two more men, were waiting in the second cross-cut till the blast went off. Old Man Dick was in the bottom of the shaft, and helped to send up the ladies and gentlemen. Mr. Challerson was the last. He said, 'It's my turn now.' He was just putting his foot into the cage when Old Man Dick pulled him down. I heard him say 'No, you don't. We'll

go together directly. Yankee Jake, your hour has come.' 'Who are you?' says Mr. Challerson. 'You old madman, how dare you? let me go this instant. Help, murder!' 'Blast you,' says Dick, not loud, but very deadly like, 'don't you know Richard Dunstan, whose wife you stole? Where is she now? Chained up and whipped, may be, in a madhouse! I'm a miserable half-mad wretch, and you're a fine gentleman, Jake Challerson; oh yes, with money and white shirts and diamond rings and a gold watch and friends, ha! ha! You left me in hell—when you stole Dolores; now I'm going there for good—and *so are you.* Then we saw them struggle—very hard Mr. Challerson fought, till Dick picked up a drill and struck him over the head with it. He fell upon his knees; then Dick gave the signal and the cage was drawn up empty."

'By the Coroner: "Why did not you and the other men rush in and interfere?"

'"We were going to do so, of course, but at the first start we saw Dick had a lighted candle always close by him, and the keg of powder open with which he had been filling the drill hole."

'The Coroner: "What happened then?"

'"We saw him drag Mr. Challerson close up to the keg; he then took the candle in his hand. We ran for our lives along the drive, and the next minute there was an explosion like a thunderbolt, and we knew what had happened. The whole place was filled with smoke, and stones and gravel sent along the drive like shot. After a bit we went to the bottom of the shaft. There we found two bodies. The roof of Mr. Challerson's head was gone, one of his arms was blown right off. Dick was lying on his face stone dead, but not torn about. He looked as if he had been smothered. We signalled for the cage, and with assistance sent both the bodies up."

'John Martin, also sworn, corroborated the evidence of the last witness. "Had been only a short time on the claim. Knew Old Man Dick as a mate. Appeared to him to have something on his mind. Could not be a better working man. Told him (witness) one day that his wife had left him years ago, and that he had never done any good since. Believed, from what he had heard, that the woman known as Dolores Lusada was the wife of the deceased, Richard Dunstan."

'Egerton Wilson, being sworn, states: "I am the teacher of the school established at Mason's, and have been resident there since the reefs opened. I knew the deceased director at Ballarat, New Zealand, and in England. His name was not Challerson, nor was he an American, though he had lived in several States and been in California. For reasons of his own, he assumed the American accent and professed to be a native of that country. He was the youngest son of the Earl of Venhamsley. I knew him as a boy, later on, when he was in the army. He was compelled to sell out on account of a dispute at cards. He left England immediately afterwards, and was some years in America. He came over from California to the Turon, where I first met him. He left afterwards for Ballarat. When I met him in New Zealand, a woman named Dolores was living with him as his wife. She went by the name of Mrs. Challerson. Have since heard that she left him, and is now in a lunatic asylum. Decline to state whether deceased was connected with the Ballarat riots, or whether I was implicated in the affair myself. We were both residents in Ballarat at the time."'

John Bulder, it seems, had also to be called upon to give evidence, his name having been mentioned by the miner known as Old Man Dick to his comrades in the claim as an old friend and acquaintance. He went to Mason's without mentioning his errand; we were only aware of the fact upon reading his sworn testimony. It was as follows: 'I recognise both the deceased men before this inquest. I knew the deceased, Richard Dunstan, many years since, though I have not seen him since he left Victoria. He, I, and the other deceased, known as Jake Challerson, but whose real name and title was the Honourable Charles Dormer, he being a younger son of Lord Venhamsley, worked together as mates at Ballarat in the year 1852. The fourth man was a Swede, named Dirk Olafsen. Richard Dunstan's wife, to whom he had lately been married, cooked for the party. Some months afterwards, when the Forest Creek Rush was at its height, deceased Challerson and Dunstan's wife eloped, and it was said lived there together. Dunstan's reason became unsettled through grief. He was placed in the lunatic asylum at Yarra Bend, where he remained for several years. I

have seen Dunstan's wife at the Oxley since I have been on the field. She was then known as Dolores Lusada, which was her name before she was married.'

'By the Coroner: "Richard Dunstan was an honest hard-working man, whom every one respected. He was always most kind in his behaviour to his wife. As to my opinion of the character of Challerson or Dormer, I knew him to be one of the most infernal scoundrels that ever walked the earth. Am aware that I am speaking of the dead. He ought to have been dead long ago. Decline to say whether Challerson was connected with the Eureka Stockade revolt; if so, it is a pity he was not shot when better men met their fate. Decline to state whether I took part in the rising myself. Am not aware that it concerns the facts of this inquest. Have no intention of being disrespectful."'

John Bulder's was the last testimony, and, with Bunsen's, placed the motive of the deed in a light so clear and distinct that no further elucidation was needed.

It was a sad termination to the gay party, which, full of pleasant anticipation and ephe-

meral joyousness, had touched the glaring streets of Mason's with such unwonted brightness of colouring. The glamour of wealth, the false splendour shed by prosperity, however acquired, had dismally disappeared. The guests had fled in panic-stricken rush. The miners, save those needed as jurymen and witnesses at the inquest, had returned doggedly to their work. Two shattered corpses lay in the great engine-shed, still incongruously gay with gaudy flags, which flapped all forgotten and unheeded. And still the quartz-crushing machine, with its ruthless ceaseless stampers, went thundering on from mid-day to midnight, unchecked, unslackened, still keeping up the same hungry sullen roar, as of a troop of lions.

The verdict of the jury, when divested of the legal phraseology with which it is considered still necessary to clothe such decisions, was to the effect—'That the deceased Jake Challerson, otherwise Charles Dormer, and the deceased Richard Dunstan had come to their deaths from injuries received consequent on the explosion of a cask of gunpowder, ignited by the said Richard Dunstan while in a state of temporary insanity.'

Such was the verdict of the jury, which no after legal action disturbed, but the stern sure verdict of the public at large, many of whom had known the slayer and the slain in years gone by, was that the prosperous criminal, the traitor, the betrayer, the false witness, and the shedder of innocent blood, had deservedly perished in the hour of his triumph by the hand of the most deeply wronged of his many victims.

'It is rarely,' commented the *Beacon*, 'that the painful duty is cast upon us of recording such awe-striking occurrences. The affair has naturally created a widely-spread sensation throughout the district, both the actors in the tragedy being well known among the mining community, although the more prosperous performer, he who had been so suddenly called upon to meet his fate, was of late more prominently before the public. As for the slayer, who assumed the terrible responsibility of compelling his own and his enemy's appearance before the bar of Heaven, let us assume that long brooding over his wrongs had deranged his mental powers, and that for the deed which hurried two unwarned human beings, with all

their imperfections on their heads, into eternity, he was but indirectly responsible.'

These reflections and allusions only appeared on the day of our departure from the Oxley, and I had in the confusion of leaving no great difficulty in keeping them from Ruth's knowledge, not wishing to shock her unnecessarily, or to mingle her pleasant experiences of the goldfield with such darksome shadows. The locality being a few miles distant from our town favoured my efforts at concealment; nor was it until some months afterwards that Ruth learned why Mr. Merlin, John Bulder, and other acquaintances had been compelled to visit Mason's on the day after Mr. Bright's *festa*.

I arranged, on this occasion, with the obliging and ubiquitous firm of Cobb and Co. to have a special coach put on for our party, of course for a consideration, but one which I cheerfully paid for the very great additional comfort. Our party was to be augmented by the Major, who had at my solicitation consented to take a short holiday in the metropolis and leave the care of the claim temporarily to our trusty partners.

CHAPTER XLIII

In view of our approaching departure, Ruth most conscientiously performed all valedictory duties and ceremonies, as to which she recognised a binding obligaton. Little was left undone which might in after-years afford cause of regret.

She had revisited the bank and refreshed her memory anew with the sight of the heavy masses of gold dust which lay darkly red in the metal shovels which were used to weigh and apportion them. She tried to lift again, with wondering exclamations, the mass of retorted gold which had come in from the quartz reef—one, indeed, the heaviest of all, from the last crushing of the Columbia and Undaunted Company Amalgamated. She smiled afresh at the old goldfields joke, wherein the courteous manager made a present to her of a bag containing

a hundredweight and a half of the root of all evil if she could carry it away. She had paid special and exhaustive visits to Mrs. Yorke and Mrs. Mangrove, leaving with each of these representative matrons delicately-devised tokens of her goodwill or souvenirs in the time to come. Mrs. Yorke, indeed, parted from her with tears in her eyes, and averred that she never had taken to any one in her life so much since a certain lady who lived in the vicinity of her old home at Campbelltown used to have her in and teach her on Sundays and hear her read the Bible when she was a little girl, 'and a deal of good it did me, if you'll believe me, Miss Allerton,' she said. 'I've seen some rough people and rough doings since I've followed the diggings, but many a time when I've been tempted to turn on poor Cyrus that's gone, or do something foolish, the thought of Mrs. Blundell's kind, gentle, beautiful face would come before me just like the face of an angel, and I'd hear her sweet voice reasoning with me for my good, just as plain as I did in the happy old days. I never could do anything to displease her, and though it is twenty years ago, and she in her grave, the very thought of her makes me

feel like a little child again. Yes, you're like her, Miss Allerton. You have the same voice, and you're the only living soul that ever reminded me of her.'

The term of our pilgrimage was completed. It had passed over even more satisfactorily than I had anticipated. Nothing save the last harsh flapping of the wing of fate had occurred in the least degree to mar Ruth's enjoyment, to subtract aught from the kindly interest which she had from the first taken in the gold hive and its working bees.

No social duty, no farewell ceremony had been left unperformed by us. Everything had been scrupulously carried out, as with a tender fidelity, towards a spot we should neither of us revisit on earth.

Together had we stood again beside the grave of poor Jane Mangold, on which now the roses were blooming and the turf was green with the first autumn showers. Ruth's tears fell fast as she recalled how she had nursed me with unfaltering care and vigilance during the long weary days and nights when I was delirious after my wound, when (as she afterwards told me) I used to make the room echo with the

name of Ruth, believing her to have forsaken and renounced me.

'But for her you might never have been spared to meet my eye again, Hereward, and I might have died, doubting, or at least not fully convinced of your love and truth; and to think that she, to whom we owe this, lies here beneath our feet, under this turf, dumb, voiceless, darkly blind to all beneath the sun. Ah me, what a tremulous, fearful joy is this life of ours! May God give us grace to live aright, and so order our lives that we may not fear the death summons that seems so perilously near at hand. Oh Hereward, "the pity of it!" if she could but have returned to the Leys, as you hoped and intended for her, what a joy it would have been to me to help to make the rest of her life happy. Poor, dear, ill-fated Jane! we must bid thee farewell on this earth for evermore, but you will not be forgotten or unmourned.' Here she stooped and plucked one of the pale roses from the well-cared-for grave, and sighing, placed it in her bosom as we slowly left the spot.

It had somehow leaked out that we were to leave the Oxley 'for good and all' on the morning after. Long before our breakfast was

concluded the Squire noticed that the streets seemed unusually crowded in the vicinity of Hennessy's corner. He inquired if there was a public holiday, or if any ukase of the Commissioner had gone forth proclaiming such to be lawful and of due force and weight.

'Not that I know of,' replied the Major, who was our companion at the morning meal, being indeed necessitated to bear us company even to the metropolis.

'Surely they can't be intending to say good-bye publicly and officially to us all?' asked the Squire. 'Who is it that is so popular? They can't have formed a profound admiration for an elderly country gentleman whom capricious fate has whisked away from his paternal acres. Hereward they know of old. It must be you, Ruth! What is your "charm," as a Frenchman would say?'

'A case of mutual admiration, love at first sight of the most pronounced type,' said Ruth, her whole face lighting up with enthusiasm. 'I really have taken an extraordinary fancy to Hereward's fellow-miners; I suppose they are gallant enough to return the compliment. I really believe they are gathering to see us off.'

This appeared to be the correct reading of the demonstration. As soon as the light American coach with its four well-matched well-conditioned grays drew up to the hotel door with our baggage carefully packed in the rack —a precautionary task I had supervised at an early hour—the street was seen to be crowded on both sides down to the farther angles. As I led Ruth towards the vehicle, a man stepped out of the densely-packed array, and raising his hat with a gesture of greeting essayed to speak. We arrested our steps. It was Mark Thursby.

'Happen ye'll stop, Miss,' he said, swaying his stalwart frame slightly, as though to accentuate the words, which with some difficulty he appropriated for the occasion, 'while I mak' shift to give ye my respects, and the o-pinion o' the miners on this field, as they've bidden me to do. They reckon as Harry Pole was allers a right-down, plucky, good-hearted chap, as worked like a man, and allers went straight, come fair weather or foul—a man as the miners was proud of, and a credit to the field. They wish him luck, and you too, Miss, and the Squire, wherever you go. They've made bold

to ask you to accept of this here bit of a wedding present, a trifle of gold that'll make up into ornaments like, to remember the miners of the Oxley by when you're far away i' th' old country.'

Here the strong man bent his head in token of obeisance, and almost timidly presented Ruth with an assortment of metallic fragments, enclosed in a wash-leather bag. As she took them in her hand she knew by their weight the value of the offering, and also by the touch that one was a nugget of somewhat uncommon size.

She looked for one moment at the grand simple face of the miner, showing a power and dignity of its own, born of the consciousness of vast strength, calm courage, and unswerving honesty—the cardinal virtues of manhood. The light came to her eyes and a flush to her cheek —less rare in these days of returning health. Then the colour faded and her eyes filled as she said with a child's sweet unconscious pathos, tremulously resolved, as she tried to keep her voice steady: 'I thank you sincerely, Mark Thursby, and my future husband's comrades, for your rich and rare gift, which I shall wear

on my wedding day. I am even more deeply grateful for the message of goodwill to me and mine. I came here for the purpose of seeing the place and the people among whom Hereward had worked so long, and who had been so true to him in good and evil fortune. I shall be glad all my life that I have done so, and I now say farewell, and pray from my innermost heart that God may bless you all.'

I lifted her into the carriage. The Squire and the Major were already on the box-seat. The high-conditioned leaders reared as the driver not unwillingly let them have their heads, when such a storm of cheers rent the air as caused the team to take the southern road, fortunately level, open, and well gravelled, at such a pace that freed the driver from any anxiety about being 'on time' for the mid-day stage. As we passed the camp we saw the whole force turned out in full uniform. Ruth raised her tear-dimmed eyes in time to view the majestic figure of the sergeant, whose ample beard seemed even more voluminous and imposing than usual; to mark Mr. Merlin on his gray charger; to recognise and return the military salute of the whole troop; and

thus we bade adieu to the Oxley for ever. Hill and dale succeeded each other as quickly as the shifting scene of a panorama; plain and woodland came into view and receded beneath the tireless rattling hoofs of the game impatient team, which now rushed excitedly at their collars, and taxed the muscle of the driver's arm, even with occasional aid from the brake. The Squire was the first to break silence.

'A twenty-mile stage to be run out from end to end at this pace, and no gruel thought of! What would they say in England, Major? We shall have to send here yet for our carriage horses, I foresee.'

. . . . . .

Sydney once more. Again the blue wavelets of the peerless haven, the Italian sky, the white gleaming Grecian villas, the tropical foliage, the breath of the ocean, the murmur of the surges throughout the silent night. How these unwonted sights and sounds acted upon our sense and intensified the beautiful effect of change—mightiest agent, rarest of the luxuries purchased by wealth.

'Is this Sydney, or, by any pardonable mistake, Paradise?' murmured the Major, as

we disembarked from our hansom at Batty's, Ruth and the Squire having preceded per four-wheeler from the Redfern terminus to Mrs. Pemberton's. 'It was very rash of me to come down before I was in a position to cut the whole thing, eh, Pole? Do you know I feel inclined now to toss up whether I shall go back at all. Write a line to the Bulders, telling them to take the claim themselves and send my share after me.'

'Why not? you and I have enough. What's the use of making oneself miserable for more? A few thousands more or less are "neither here nor there," as Cyrus used to say.'

'H—m!' meditatively replied the Major. 'I must consider that part of the case during the next fortnight. Try how the half-pay business works; haven't had any previous experience. This is almost too awfully jolly, I must say. Wonderful thing the sea, when you come to think of it, isn't it? as that brown-bearded stock-rider said, do you remember, who confessed that he saw it for the first time. Ha! ha! a breakfast under these circumstances isn't a breakfast, is it?

No; always assuming that garfish are in season, it is a feast for the gods!'

Mrs. Allerton duly expressed and reiterated her extreme and unaffected surprise at the appearance of her daughter, whom she and Mrs. Pemberton asserted to have returned from her sojourn in the wilds of the interior in positively rude health.

Sydney appeared to have agreed passably well with Mrs. Allerton, maugre the heat and mosquitoes, these latter beasts of prey being kept at bay by the integrity of Mrs. Pemberton's curtains, while a daily walk in the Domain and the *entrée* to the Botanical Gardens had quite compensated for the minor inconveniences.

Matters being in such a highly satisfactory state, no valid reason could be adduced for deferring the ceremony which was to seal my long-deferred, now ofttimes despaired of, happiness. The day was actually fixed, incredible as it may seem, and such perspective arrangements made as included the appointment of the Major as groomsman and such other necessary selections as befitted a very quiet wedding, where few but the actual per-

sonages and Ruth's parents where likely to attend.

So the great, the glorious day being decided on, after such interval as was required absolutely by the not altogether unchronicled *modistes* of Sydney, the wedding raiment put in hands, *nous autres* had nothing to do but to wander about and enjoy ourselves, if possible, until my happiness could be transacted.

Somewhat to our surprise, the Squire joined us in all our excursions, and, like Dr. Johnson with Bennet Langton and Topham Beauclerk, professed himself keenly eager for the diversion of a 'frisk' in our company.

'I shall regret Sydney and these pleasant rambles I know when I return,' he would say. 'I wish the South Head lay within hail of us elderly country fogies!'

'Surely,' pleaded the Major, 'when you can run over to Paris in half a day, and have the capitals of Italy, Germany, Russia—what not—all within a week or so when you want a little change, and can pay for it, is there not enough to satisfy a reasonable Briton?'

'You didn't quite see my point, my dear Major. What is the advantage of Paris,

Rome, Venice, half a score of capitals, with all the grandeur and glory of the world packed up among them, to me, Geoffrey Allerton, *ætat.* sixty? I'm too old to take pleasure in merely watching the parti-coloured stream of life flow by. "The brave days when we were twenty-one" have passed away with all that gave them joy and savour. I can't stare at picture-galleries all day long or listen to music by the hour either.'

'Then what do you want?' quoth the Major, 'for I can't for the life of me divine.'

'Does it not occur to you,' queried the Squire, looking at him with the kind, wise smile I remembered so well, 'that a man of my age and country tastes would much rather run across to a younger, a greater, and a newer England if he could do it by a week's travel, than to any of the places you have named? There he would see the agricultural problems that he had studied all his life worked out—by his own countrymen too—under other and more favourable conditions.'

'Now I begin to perceive,' said the Major. 'A light breaks in upon me. Hereward, the governor is a bigoted agriculturist; he has

contracted the cockatoo complaint, I'm afraid; on the part of the "legitimate miner" I protest against him!'

'Not at all,' I say, coming to the rescue. 'It's the big grazing areas that have fetched him — hearing of Jimbour with a couple of hundred thousand sheep, and Boorooman with forty thousand head of cattle. Besides, we did see a hundred and fifty mares and foals in one paddock at Wendalong.'

'And not a bad one among them,' broke in the Squire. 'Well, I confess I could spend the winter here with the greatest possible enjoyment. These are the things which would interest me, and I own it. Besides, all the great properties are in the hands of Englishmen, managed more or less in English fashion. I don't take the same interest, I admit, in the operations of foreigners.'

'I can sympathise with you, Squire,' I said. 'For many a day I used to watch the farmers at their ploughing near Buninyong on a fine spring morning and long to have the stilts in my hand again. It always put me in mind of the Leys.'

'Australia has only to bide her time,' con-

tinued the Squire, who had become serious; 'but the march of events does not lag in these days of steam and telegraph. As the races swarmed westward in the old-world days when corn land and grass land became scarce, as the Norsemen later on took to their war-galleys in search of free forage and brought home gold and captives, so now the surplus strength of Europe is passing over both oceans. Columbia will absorb one wing; but Australia, rich in minerals, soil, and sunshine, will bid high for the other. We are standing here in one of the great capitals of the world that is to be.'

'How you will surprise your old neighbours at Allerton Court when you return, Squire,' said I.

'I have gained food for thought, my boy, which will last me for the remainder of my days,' he answered earnestly, 'besides some comprehension of the prospects of my fellow-Britons in the south, and that is more than most country gentlemen can say. Besides, mark my words, both of you—we have nothing to do but talk for a day or two, you know—a great change is coming over the British farmer,

and, through him, over the landlord. With cheap corn from America, live stock and meat from this country, an enormous trade, hardly yet thought of, but, it strikes me, feasible enough, how can Farmer Giles pay the rent he does now? Answer me that. He and his son must emigrate, I say; and where can they come to with half the chance of doing well as to a country with kingdoms of cheap land like this? And they will come—they must come; I feel assured of it.'

'It is a thousand pities, as you say, Squire, that Botany Heads are not within a week or ten days' trip, like America. They get the pick of our English immigrants; the voyage is so short that they are safely landed in less time than would have served to make up their mind about starting for Australia.'

CHAPTER XLIV

The day of days arrived at length, lingering as had been the diurnal periods—or rather ages, æons, eternities—which preceded it. But for the punctual appearance of the sun, that unfailing wonder-sign in southern lands, I might have imagined that some especial disarrangement of the solar system had taken place for my express discomfiture. Good kind Mrs. Allerton, in spite of my entreaties, would not abate an hour of the stipulated time which had been agreed upon as necessary for the awful preliminaries so incomprehensible to men. Ruth, too, was unkind enough to smile, and remark that as we had waited years an additional month could not matter so much. In vain I brought forward arguments as to the frightful uncertainty of human life, the prevalence of epidemics, the recklessness of cabmen, the tempests of the

equinox, probable earthquakes, all things and each which might occur to frustrate our new-found happiness if longer delayed. Nothing availed me. I was compelled to solace myself, as had other impatient lovers, with reflections on the curious obstinacy of a sex which poets and romancers have, for some inscrutable reason, conspired to depict as soft and yielding.

But the winds and the waves, the stars in their courses, the forces of nature, with the lesser powers of human life and society, combined to favour the votive and supreme ceremony of our love.

The sun-god of the south, celestial, effulgent, rose on the most entrancing day that had dawned since first the summer breeze whispered to the ocean 'neath the lone headlands or by the silver sands of Rose Bay; surely on that charmed strand the fays of the southern main first danced to the mystic moon. Clear and bright as the 'gold bar of heaven' I watched God's glorious messenger of light and warmth majestically uprise through an azure cloudless sky. It was the pale dawn flushed and glowed. It was the city of the Apocalypse — amber and pearl, rose, amethyst, and jacinth. All

things were transfigured. It was from a fresh creation I seemed to issue forth, redeemed from a world of strife and labour, henceforth to inhabit a sphere of peace, of radiant happiness, which was to know no time or limit. We were but a small party as we met at the massive, old-fashioned, but still favourite and venerable church, with its alleys of araucaria and Moreton Bay fig-trees. Hard by was Mrs. Pemberton's house and the glorious sea-terraced garden pleasance wherein we had wandered so many happy hours. With the Major, whose faultless attire defied the most fastidious club critic, came Mr. Bright, whose leave of absence appeared perennial. The Commissioner, with Mr. Merlin and Olivera, had managed to sever themselves temporarily from their onerous duties, and to stand by me on that day. Certain delicate-featured willowy-figured Sydney demoiselles, friends of Mrs. Pemberton's, who had professed themselves quite too awfully charmed to assist at such a touching ceremonial, officiated as bridesmaids, and these were the only stranger guests in all the company. Ah, how different would it have been at Allerton Court!—a remark which Mrs. Allerton could not help

making in the maternal fulness of her heart. But she saw the bright hues of health again mantling on Ruth's cheek, so long a stranger to the warmer tints, and marked the love-light which glowed and sparkled in her soft bright eye. The flower-laden ocean breeze stole through the open windows of the old church, and during the hush and stillness, with the solemn tones of the aged clergyman mingled ever and anon melodious surge-voices, chaunting their deep rhythmical antistrophe. The beauty and strangeness of the surroundings, where we now indissolubly sealed our union, overcame her motherly o'ercharged heart, and the tears of joy and thankfulness filled her eye and rolled unheeded adown her cheek.

Our wedding dejeuner, though a tiny festival, was complete; and, thanks to Mrs. Pemberton's taste and sympathy, utterly perfect in detail.

Merlin confessed that he had never tasted such champagne since his last dinner at Very's. Mr. Bright proposed the health of the leading performers with effect and feeling. The Major was compelled to undertake the toast 'The bridesmaids,' which doubtless he did under a mental reservation equivalent to 'without prejudice.'

The Commissioner and the Squire arranged to meet in Northamptonshire, not far from the historic Kirby Gate, in two years' time, which appointment, strange to say, did come off, by reason of the uncle of him (Blake) dying in the meantime and making testamentary dispositions of astounding liberality.

. . . . . .

We had planned to pass our earlier wedded days amid the fern-fringed glades and weird primeval forests of New Zealand. The month had not ended when we were steaming south over the restless sea which heaves and moans evermore before the still fathomless fiords of the West coast and the snow peaks of Treble Mount. We explored the hot blue springs of Waiwera, and luxuriated by starlight in the alabaster shell baths of Rotomahana.

We saw the magic lake that divides the pink and the white terraces; more marvels of the land of the Maori; the yellow and green mosaics; the silver-fretted fairy rock-work, so beauteous seeming to the eye, so wondrous soft to the touch. Ruth's state of mind almost approached intoxication; her admiration was boundless.

'I can imagine all about those people who came here and never returned to civilisation. The lotus-eaters were no myths after all. This is the land of enchantment.'

Ruth now congratulated herself that she had, early in her *suzerainetć*, signified her intention of thoroughly acquainting herself with this new world before she returned to the old for the remainder of our days.

'We are young and adventurous now,' she said, 'or at least I am. Before we settle down to the dear unchanging English country life, why should not we see as much of this wonderful land of yours—the land which has done so much for both of us—as we can? In the long dark winters and not too sunshiny summers of our northern home will it not be pleasant to recall this free untrammelled life—this wandering hand-in-hand through the Eden that now lies around us?'

'I never heard of a female Vanderdecken,' I say musingly. 'Can it be our fate to travel everlastingly, "prospecting" for hidden treasures of knowledge till we are too worn and gray to utilise them?'

'You are the laziest creature,' she says, pre-

tending to frown. 'I believe you never would have made anything more than tucker—isn't that the expression?—if it hadn't been for your mates and your backers, male and female, eh, sir?'

'May I be permitted to express a hope that Mrs. Hereward Pole will not come out with expressive colonialisms when—I mean if—we return to England?'

'Mrs. Hereward Pole—how very grand a title—is generally *en accord* with her surroundings, social or otherwise. But seriously, Harry dearest, you are not in a hurry to find yourself *planté là* in the dear old kingdom of Kent? Can we be happier than we are now, without a thought of the morrow, without cares or engagements, and with "a new heaven and a new earth" uprising before our gaze with every morn? In the after-time, if we are like other people, we shall have sufficient sameness and settled life to content the most *exigeante* of British matrons.'

'I will go with you to the end of the world,' I murmured; 'we will sail on thus "till the sun grows cold and the stars are old," only let me lie at your feet and gaze into your eyes, love-

illumined and tender-bright, for ever, as I do now!'

The Squire and Mrs. Allerton did not desire to explore further the earth's surface, and having, as they thought, sufficiently improved their understanding with travel and adventure, they placed themselves on board the Peninsular and Oriental Company's majestic steamer *Hindostan* without unnecessary waste of time. Mr. Allerton much congratulated himself that they had evaded the rigours of an English winter, and would arrive just in time to welcome the budding leaves of spring.

For ourselves, we carried out Ruth's programme, to which I secretly inclined all the more for having observed that the free unmonotoned life of 'riding o'er land, sailing o'er sea,' was building up her constitution to a point of vigour and endurance which I could scarcely have hoped for in her early Australian days.

So beneath the Southern Cross we roamed far and wide and saw many things, and ere the winter winds commenced to howl, like wolves baying around the ice-peak of the Pole, we fled away towards the summer isles of the

purple sea, and there possessed our souls in halcyon enjoyment.

Hand in hand we watched the graceful flower-wreathed maidens of Hawaii dance, as the earth's first-born daughters danced beneath the broad moon's silver ray; saw the Kanaka dive through the transparent water of coral-fringed bays, and watched the cocoa-nut palm wave welcome to the fleets of swift-darting canoes with their joyous oarsmen. We brushed with careful foot the smouldering lava of Kilauea, through the crevices of which Ruth, shuddering, marked the red glowing eternal fires of a nether visible and palpable Hades. We gazed on the vast blocks and silent halls of the great temple of Iono—built by the hands of the spectral dead. At midnight we were lighted on our homeward path by a heaving sea of molten fire, through which the red domes of lava arose to heave and fall—in hissing fragments, amid pale green films of vapour, and a faint lace-tracery of mist.

Still another moon and we are on board the *New York City*, among the passengers, who were regaled with ice still pure as when first from the caves of Lake Wenham, and salmon

fresh as when congealed the first day of its capture. Entering by the Golden Gate we saw the other great gold city of the earth—San Francisco, and were entertained by a cousin of poor Gus Maynard with the royal hospitality in which Americans excel all the nations of the earth. Under his guidance, or rather in his train, we 'did' the Yosemite, Los Angelos, the Mammoth Tree, and even, what interested Ruth most, the wall of the old mission St. Pedro, whereon were traced legends not unconnected with 'the old, old song,' old when these old walls were young, 'Manuela of La Torre.' Onward again by trains which threaded the awful snow solitude and lone peaks of the Rocky Mountains, through great cities which had been waving forest solitudes but yesterday, over prairie-oceans where the far horizon showed nor hill nor tree—naught but endless flower-strewn plains, as league after league stretched beneath the tireless swift-speeding iron steed, over billowy waving seas of giant grasses and lavish herbage products of the boundless generosity of nature in the far west, over tressel bridges which trembled and vibrated as the long train wound

its oscillating way across shuddering abysses. We reach the ocean of the north, again the wondrous Atlantic shore; we dwell in great cities, wondering and awe-stricken at the labour results of the Briton left free to develop his many-sided nature and boundless energy in a new land of limitless resources. We commence to feel restless—only a week and then home, home!—ah, me! The wanderers have reached home—England, the dear old chalk cliffs of Albion—at last.

From my old friends and true comrades can I now part for evermore without further mention? Can I leave the generous sympathetic reader of these rambling pages to pine in uncertainty, rendering herself uneasy as to what became of Mrs. Yorke and Mrs. Mangrove, whether Mr. Merlin married, if the Commissioner returned to England, or Mr. Bright became chief inspector of banking institutions, with *carte blanche* for champagne and oysters, and unlimited leave of absence? He who indites even so humble a chronicle of men and manners as this, which now draws to a close—and time, too, perhaps grumble impatient youth, when the heroine is married—

cannot complete the task without a tender feeling of regret. Have we said farewell, and for ever, to all the personages, fair and friendly, loyal or false, gentle and simple, which have moved, have spoken, have strutted their hour upon our tiny stage? Shall we never meet again in this world? Alas! some are dead and gone; even in the world of fiction there is a savour of reality; and we could mourn—if we might—for the bright eyes that have 'forgotten to shine,' for the brave hearts whose pulses are for ever stilled. When the golden holes known to this day as Greenstone Dyke and No. 4 claims were exhausted and utterly worked out, the party was broken up for good and all. The whole plant, the whim, the tools, the huts, the Major's cottage — every mortal thing down to a worn-out hide bucket—was sold by auction and the proceeds divided among the shareholders. Roan Bessie, the whip-horse that had drawn up so many thousand buckets of wash-dirt, was bought in by Joe Bulder, who had made up his mind to purchase an estate on the Hawkesbury and settle down to his old occupation of farming. In this resolution he was supported by Mrs.

Yorke, who had definitely consented to become his wife, and to entrust her 'pile,' as she phrased it, and the welfare of her children to her late husband's comrade.

'Now the ground's worked out and the party broke up,' she said, in explaining the matter to Mrs. Mangrove confidentially, 'I feel that unsettled that if there was a new rush broke out in the middle of Californy, I'd be bound to follow it, which must be foolishness with all the money I've got in the bank. So jest as I was thinkin' how awkward it 'ld be not to have a soul to cook for or to chaff a bit when they come in from work, and grizzlin' over poor Cyrus as is dead and gone, this old Joe must come and ketch hold of my hand and offer to take a half-share in all future interests. Well, I agreed to transfer, with the parson for registrar, and I don't know as I could better it much. Marryin's a long lease not easy cancelled if the labour conditions ain't carried out as we've all seen on this field. But Joe and poor Cyrus was always good mates. He's as sober and steady as Roan Bessie, very nigh; never was off his shift, hot or cold, wet or dry. He'll be a good dad to the young 'uns, and he's

that used to doin' what I tell him that it won't come strange to him by-and-by, as it might to some chaps as never worked in the party.'

So Mrs. Yorke, holding that it would simplify matters, was married first, and travelled down country afterwards with Roan Bessie and another horse in a cart with the children and other portables, much in the same fashion as they had come to the rush. They could begin to be top sawyers, she said, when they got to Sydney, and then they could make a fair start and launch out at their leisure.

I am bound to say that their wedding, as reported in the *Beacon*, was an imposing affair, and in a manner far more splendid than ours. The Oxley Church of England building was so full that seats were not procurable, and numbers of the friends of the bride and the bridegroom, who had rolled up in force, were constrained to stand outside.

A stupendous breakfast at Hennessy's is yet quoted in mining circles, at which the health of the happy pair was drunk in every conceivable liquor, from lager beer to maraschino, while the benediction was pronounced in more tongues than had been set going at once since the

Tower of Babel. And the ball at night, at which the happy pair led off the first dance, was such an entertainment as recalled the 'brave days of old' to all old prospectors and 'forty-niners.'

Next day, before the sun was well up, the camp was deserted, and Joe and his wife on their way to Sydney.

Jack Bulder had, fortunately for himself, joined the ranks of the Good Templars some months since. He, therefore, was enabled to appear at the marriage and subsequent festivities without risk, and on those somewhat dangerous occasions—teetotally speaking—he conducted himself with a perfect, though somewhat pensive propriety. He consistently declined matrimony on his own account for the time to come, residing at intervals with his brother, to whose children he willed his fortune in anticipation of the sudden death which he always prophesied would be his fate. Some years afterwards he was drowned by the foundering of his yacht, the *Favourite*, in a gale, between Melbourne and Sydney, when his bank shares served to consolidate the increasing prosperity of the Yorkes and Bulders,

the second generation of which, well educated and well endowed, may yet take rank among Australian notables.

Some weeks after we had left the Oxley, Edward Morsley was put upon his trial at the Assize Court held at Russell, and after a careful and protracted examination of the evidence, found guilty of wilful murder and sentenced to death. Beyond reiterating a statement that poor Jane had taken her own life in despair at being at the last moment prevented from sailing for England, he made no attempt to exculpate himself or evade his doom.

Remorseless ruffian though he might be, he was 'brave with the she-wolf's courage grim, dying hard and dumb, torn limb from limb.' When the drop was finally arranged, and after he had been pinioned, he motioned to the hangman's assistant as if wishing to speak. The clergyman came over—he had in vain urged him to confess—and listened intently. These were the criminal's last words: 'Now look here, what I want to know is this: am I standing perfectly square and straight?' The good man sighed and commenced the prayer for the dying. The drop fell, and the innocent

blood was avenged as far as human justice could compass such expiation.

It was a fact—let us say a coincidence—that within a year of our departure by easy stages for Europe, unlooked-for good fortune commenced to shower its benefits upon nearly all the members of our *camaraderie*. The Commissioner's uncle died, leaving him and that brother with whose name and fame we were tolerably familiar, a considerable fortune. Mr. Jack Blake acted up to his Christian name and family traits (was there ever a Jack of sordid soul?) He divided the inheritance with the Commissioner, whereupon that high official swiftly departed for England, taking two couple of his kangaroo dogs with him. Smoker and Spring he could not leave behind, while Forester would show some of the home coursing men that in roughish country a 'dawg' reared in Australia could make it very hot for the hares of the period.

The last sensational legend that will ever be told by Australian camp fires about 'The Captain,' arose out of the grand farewell dinner in his honour the evening before he started for Sydney *en route* for Europe. The officials of

the goldfield, the gentry of the district and the neighbouring towns, mustered strong. The wines were undeniable. The honour of the Civil Service stood involved; there was but little flinching. Towards the end of the evening a slight difference of opinion arose between Blake and an argumentative surgeon formerly in the army; moreover born north of the Tweed. It referred to a question of genealogy, leading to that of the county rank and precedence of his family, anent which sacred subject Blake was wont to be unusually stiff and dignified towards the small hours.

As ill-luck would have it, the contumacious doctor accompanied him and Bagstock towards the camp after all was over, when he was ill-advised enough to recommence the argument.

'It's a vara odd thing, noo I come to think o't,' he said musingly. 'I was quartered in Galway, close to Tuam and Dunmore, for three years. I can recollect fine the Dillons and Brownes, the Frenches and O'Malleys, by the score, but the deil a Blake I can ca' to mind for the life o' me.'

'By ——!' growled the Commissioner, and as he spoke he seized him with both hands, and

exerting his enormous strength, lifted him high in the air as if he had been a child. 'You'll remember one of the Blakes after this night, I'll go bail.'

A deep-water race just then crossed their path in which the ice-cold waters led from a mountain stream hurried, gleaming in the dim light. Into this Blake dashed the unlucky doctor, and striding forward, left him to struggle out the best way he could with Bagstock's aid, whose only consoling remark, as he dragged out the dripping and sputtering victim, was, 'I should have thought you had more s-s-sense, doctor, than to argue with the Commissioner at t-t-two o'clock in the m-m-morning.'

A bronzed soldierly-looking man, whose straight going and utter indifference to obstacles are somewhat at variance with his snow-white hair and beard, has for some seasons been well known with the Pychley—a dead shot, an authority on greyhounds which brings him nearly on a level with Stonehenge as a referee and authority, the latter days of the erstwhile 'Billy' Blake of the 11th Hussars—whose name was the synonym for feats of daring, beside which foolhardiness was cautious

prudence—pass peacefully and happily. But still in all parts of Australia, when miners gather round a camp fire, or the tongues grow lissom under the influence of good fellowship and potent liquor, some racy saying or autocratic act of Commissioner Blake's is quoted, and for long years yet the name of 'The Captain' will be a spell to conjure with on the banks of the Oxley.

Mrs. Mangrove and John, true to their principles, were among the earliest arrivals at the great Matamora rush, which occurred years after the Oxley. There they erected the first hotel and sold it at a large profit. They built another, specially retaining the name, and stocked a large store before the second detachment of new arrivals flocked in. As the first American coach arrived, carrying about fifty odd passengers, and the reins of the seven horses handled by a gigantic Canadian were thrown to the helpers, there was such a rush to Mangrove's Hotel that the inexperienced felt sure that a fight or a bushrangers' raid was on (so the *Matamora Herald* pleasantly put it).

'It's only "the boys," John,' said the long-experienced hostess, as the bronzed and bearded

faces, fresh from Queensland, New Zealand, Victoria, and Kiandra, welcome breathing, thronged the hotel, hustling one another like schoolboys, and casting their swags recklessly on the verandah.

Mrs. Mangrove expressed herself to the effect that it was quite like old times; John, who had been smiling silently throughout the whole performance, merely replying as he gave expressive nods to the hearty greetings of old acquaintances, 'Regular stunning good rush, boys; 120 oz. nugget got by one man simply.'

Mr. Bright, like the Commissioner, was indebted to a considerate relation for a bequest which, somewhat to his regret, absolved him from the necessity of forming branches at new goldfields and defending the property of the Bank of New Holland like a mediæval champion against all comers. He and Mr. Merlin met in Paris the following year, when the latter gentleman was enabled to display his proverbial knowledge of gastronomy under the most favourable conditions, and together they experienced such dinners as can only be realised in dreams south of the line. We had the pleasure of talking over old times with them during the

shooting season at Allerton Court, where Australian stories were reproduced for the benefit of some of the magnates of the county—tales of wonder to which Mr. Bright's exceptional shooting, when we got to the preserves, lent ample corroboration.

. . . . . .

Surely it is decreed and fore-ordained that the lives of some men should be divided into periods of war and peace. The youth of those who, like myself,

> 'Have striven and toïled and fought it out
> Under the hard blue sky'

of a far land is filled full of the hazard and the glory, the grim perils and the stormy joys of war, of dreary watching in trenches, dogged endurance of defeat, intoxicating triumph of victory.

To some men-at-arms it is given to march proudly in through the gate of the beleaguered city of Fortune, with drum and trumpet and banners flying, while comrades lie dead in the breach or disabled on the plain.

Let him who emerges from the battle of life safe, enriched, and honoured by all men, be

more than content, be humbly thankful to the great Being by whose mercy he, all unworthy, was spared while so many perished on the march or the stricken field.

For me, Hereward Pole, the reign of peace has distinctly set in, now and for ever. Henceforth, save when the shadow of the wing of Azrael the Death Angel, from whom no household rich or poor may claim immunity, darkens my threshold, no faintest fear of fate or trace of care or grief was mingled with my life.

I was fortunate in being able to purchase an estate which marched with Allerton Court, and which the Squire, in a mild and Christian-like way, had always coveted. The house was delightful—perhaps too large and complete for the land which surrounded it. But for that we did not particularly care. My son would be the heir of Allerton Court, and in the fulness of time, upon the death of the Squire, which apparently will not take place for long years to come—would that he may become a centenarian—we shall occupy that time-honoured pile.

And do I manage to fill up satisfactorily the great intervals of absolute leisure in this wholly new and untried life, free from all necessity to

work with head or hand—a pensioned idler and non-combatant, guaranteed against all the ills of mortality except *ennui*?

Well, yes, I get along, and find unalloyed happiness a fairly payable claim. Ruth and I are nearly as much at Allerton Court as at Combe Hall, our own, our very own place, which is almost too comfortable, not to say luxurious. The Major has pretty well taken up his abode with us, and the Major's room is one of the recognised apartments of the house. He is a confirmed bachelor; our friendship is, therefore, unlikely to alter in degree. When country life palls upon us, we are graciously permitted by Ruth to fish in Norway, to hunt in the shires, to run down to Scotland in the grouse season, and even, one particularly cold winter, to try a little lion-stalking in Algeria.

I am a magistrate, and thus moderately interested in county business. Besides, London is not such a very bad place for a few days now and then. Rome and Venice we think we know something about; but we are forbidden to go to Russia, or to stay more than a fortnight in Paris at a time. With a few of these distractions, always accessible within forty-eight

hours or a trifle over, it is surprising how the year gets disposed of. Every now and then a fresh Australian turns up that I hear of at the Reform Club, the Travellers, or the Athenæum, and I bring him out to Ruth's great interest and satisfaction. Olivera himself appeared one day, having 'at long last,' as his Irish mate said, made a fortune suddenly in tin, and become one of the leading capitalists of Stanthorpe. He had played a waiting race, and won fortune's sweepstake on the post in the last heat.

In my study, as the modest apartment is called which contains my private and personal effects, hang many prints, pictures, and other delineations, more or less *en souvenir* of far lands and strange adventures. But the one which I occasionally find Ruth and the children gazing steadfastly at—our nursery is pretty full, and Hereward the second, commonly called Harry, is growing a big boy and clamorous for a Shetland—is a small much-crumpled piece of parchment, framed in wonderful dead gold Venetian, and which, after detailing for the hundredth time some spirit-stirring goldfields adventure of which papa was the hero, she

proudly describes, for the benefit of any youthful visitors, as a talismanic document without which no one can dig gold in Australia—none other, in fact, than a real, true, authentic 'Miner's Right.'

THE END

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